The Public Sector Department

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This department provides assessment, funding and administration services to other departments within their part of the public sector. **The department was very successful and growing quickly.** More and more employees were being recruited and over the previous twelve months a tier of new managers had been gradually put in place.

Yet the department was experiencing problems with staff discipline. The chief executive had noticed that staff timekeeping was suddenly an issue, that people's appearance and behaviour seemed somehow sloppier and managers were reporting that when they attempted to address the poor standards,

they were met with challenges and "back chat" from the staff.

Wanting to nip this behaviour in the bud, the chief executive invited Fathom to discuss the situation with her senior team. As we talked, a number of critical insights emerged. Firstly we recognised that the department had probably reached a point of transition – originally very small and informal, it had grown to a point where the behaviour of staff could no longer be influenced simply by the example set by the chief executive and her colleagues. Organisational norms and expectations now needed to be made more explicit and their maintenance had to be properly delegated to the new first-line management team.

At the same time, we realised that these managers were quite young, new to their roles and lacking in management experience. They had often been promoted from within their teams and

were struggling to deploy their legitimate management authority, especially with their former colleagues and peers.

We designed a two-day development programme for the entire management team. Focused on the key capability of managing people, we wanted to give those managers permission to use their authority appropriately, as well as the skills to uphold standards, and without disrupting the department's warm organisational culture. We looked at the helpful role of organisational policies and sent managers away to research which applied to their department. We also debated a series of management dilemmas – for instance, was it acceptable or unacceptable for an employee to talk about his or her work and colleagues on Facebook?

Then we practised assertiveness and feedback skills.

By the time we went back to evaluate, it was clear that things had moved on. **The management team was more confident and the department more settled, the senior team no longer full of stories and outrage.**

Sometimes it only takes a small intervention, well timed of course, to effect a significant change. **99**

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