



Making a difference

Programme and Project Management practices contribute to the successful delivery of change across the NHS. A Portfolio, Programme and Project Management improvement initiative is being carried out within the NHS to help develop and promote skills, knowledge and experience in these areas.

“Making a difference in the NHS is all about putting people at the centre of things, delivering service improvement and commissioning an effective solution” says Alicia Ridout, Strategic Development Manager for Continuing Care at NHS Leeds. Alicia is working on a 2 year programme for the transformation of continuing care for people who need long term assistance, and is driven by her desire to deliver effective improvements that make a real difference to people’s lives.

Alicia’s career started as an HND graduate in Food Technology working for a large food manufacturer, but she later moved into Occupational Therapy for Mental Health and qualified as a therapist specialising in acute and community mental health. She has worked as a Therapy Manager for the Priory Hospital, and as a Clinical Team Manager and Practice Development Lead.

Crossing boundaries

Whilst the environments in which she has used her skills may have varied, Alicia is clear that a career is less defined by a specific industry or professional label, than by what the individual is looking to achieve. “My career, or profession,” she stresses, “is about trying to ‘make a difference’. In all of my roles, I have simply used the tools and techniques that are available to me to get the job done, efficiently and effectively. In some instances, these may be generic management skills, in others these may fall more squarely under the banner of ‘project and programme management’. Many of the skills that are critical to project success are not exclusive to the project management profession. For instance, when faced with a situation requiring conflict management, I am more likely to call upon my counselling training. That’s one of the attractions of project management – the skills used are incredibly versatile, and cross career and organisational boundaries very easily.”



Alicia explains that her time working on projects in the private sector left her with an instinctive focus on business benefits and an ability to achieve a high level strategic perspective that has been of great value to her in the NHS. Likewise, her experience in occupational therapy enhanced her abilities in problem solving and identifying creative solutions. She considers in retrospect that each client could have been regarded as a change project, with the therapist supporting them through that change.

By the time Alicia began working on larger projects in a more formal project management environment, she had already gained expertise in a variety of essential skills, from planning and systematic thinking to negotiation and influencing techniques. Her organisational leadership skills were also highly developed, making her well placed for success in her project management roles. Alicia's qualifications include an MSc in Professional Health Studies and the ILM Level 5 (Institute of Leadership & Management), which covered project management but reflects her broad management interests.

Influence and agility

Alicia believes that whilst it is invaluable for a project manager to work to a recognised framework, there

is much latitude to influence how specific challenges are approached. She is an ardent proponent of 'action learning', which she uses as a part of her own self-development strategy and makes this technique available to the teams she works with. The technique encourages people to look at problems in a variety of ways and from different perspectives; it tests innovative techniques and analyses the reasons why particular options have worked well.

"Project managers need to have a high degree of mental agility," she confirms, "They must be able to look at a project from the perspective of all the different groups affected by it. It simply isn't enough just to follow a set process, and assume that the desired results will follow. You have to reassess constantly and gently steer the project back onto the right track.

Worthwhile results

"Making a difference and putting patients at the centre of things is what motivates me" she concludes. "It is essential that you always ask the question 'Why?' followed by 'Can I influence the system?' – and you need to believe that you can. The final critical question is 'Is what I am doing worthwhile?' Working in the NHS, where people stand to benefit so much, the answer is very much 'Yes, it is worthwhile.

"Making a difference and putting patients at the centre of things is what motivates me"

For further information please contact:

Sarah Briggs
Development Manager
sarah.briggs2@nhs.net

Ref: 4483 © Crown Copyright 2009

