

Serco's culture is one of its key competitive differentiators. The culture is reflected in the company's leadership style of empowerment, trust and achieving a balance between the needs of customers, staff and shareholders. This leadership style is different from many of Serco's clients but is often critical to the success of their contracts. Serco were looking to 'encode' the culture and focus on its practical application in all aspects of decision-making rather than just theory.

The analysis of existing and newly hired senior managers revealed development needs in the following areas:

- **awareness/differentiation** - the ability to distinguish between desirable and undesirable leadership styles and realise the possible impact of an undesirable leadership style
- **attitude** - the motivation to reflect on and adapt own leadership style if and where appropriate
- **application** - the capability to apply the Serco culture, values and best management practice to all aspects of one's own role.

To determine the context in which managers could evaluate how their personal style differed from Serco best practice, our lead consultants designed a unique sequence of workshops to identify and model realistic 'critical instance scenarios'. These scenarios involve three other organisations and 11 people in all, and the user plays the role of an Operations Director of a Private Finance Initiative tasked with running three hospitals. Serco is responsible for maintenance and services at the three sites and there is a potentially serious safety problem brewing.

At key points the user is asked to select the course of action that reflects Serco's values and leadership best practice. These are critical decisions about how to lead the team and manage stakeholders. The course provides expert feedback on the choices made and 'plays out' the likely consequences.

Events unfold rapidly and the user is faced with conflicting demands. Information comes to the user as e-mails, documents, phone calls, voicemails (audio) and people 'knocking' at the door and the user must assess and respond to all the demands as they happen. (Documents and messages accumulate to enable the user to refer back to them). For added incentive the decisions cause a rise or fall in the company's share price.

Over 700 directors and managers within Serco have used this programme as part of their joining Serco, or as an introduction to the leadership programme. It has proved to be equally effective for individuals and when used with a group to stimulate discussion.

Further information can be found on our web site (www.head-light.co.uk), including the following additional case studies - Grainger PLC, BPP Professional Education, Hertfordshire Constabulary, a major fmcg manufacturer and Visteon (USA).