

The Project:

Dramatic Partnership: An innovative programme designed to improve performance through staff engagement. This involved organisational visits to three VECs where staff at all levels took part in confidential discussions with Professor Peter Totterdill (UKWON) and Gwen Moore (VECNPF). A short report was produced on each organisation and an original script developed, which inculcated common themes, challenges and opportunities from the three organisations. A one-day change conference was delivered in each of the three VECs, involving an interactive Forum Theatre presentation and workshop. This resulted in a set of specific actions, and the formation of a working group to take these actions and ideas forward.

Quality & Content:

The interactive Forum Theatre approach enabled the organisations involved to examine and problem-solve around some difficult and challenging issues in a non-threatening way. The quality of the script was excellent, and skilfully threaded a difficult line between challenging and entertaining its active witnesses. A crucial element of the script and its performance (by excellent actors) was that it inspired in its audience *identification*: with the issues, characters, systems and actions presented. This provided an ideal spring-board for developing shared solutions. In content, the presentation tackled specific challenges identified through the organisational visits as well as timely sectoral topics such as proposed amalgamations, staff-cutbacks etc.

Impact:

In contrast to more conventional forms of workshops/training, Forum theatre has the ability to simultaneously delight and challenge the participant. Its capacity to engage with the emotional life of those watching can free up the participants to engage in discussions in a more honest and open manner. Once handled skilfully, which UKWON did, this potential can be harnessed to develop meaningful solutions to the challenges facing an organisation (both internal and external). The interactive nature of the presentation (hot seating characters, interrupting the action, changing outcomes etc) facilitates a sense of empowerment in the participants, enabling them to tackle difficult issues with enthusiasm.

Facilitation:

UKWON's experience in effectively facilitating diverse groups in a change-conference setting was evident. All aspects of the facilitation centred on fostering the *active participation* of attendees. Utilising diagonal, silo and working group seating arrangements for discussions and action-planning was particularly effective in optimising the interest and enthusiasm of participants throughout the day. Most important was the emphasis on developing working groups to take the change agenda forward and report on it.

In terms of project organisation and delivery, UKWON were professional, flexible, supportive and reliable.