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KNOWLEDGE GENERATION SERVICES

INFO NOTE 2:

SERVICES FOR HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Knowledge and people ... using your most valuable assets effectively

The following information has *been produced specifically for clients in the Housing sector*. Although *Knowledge Generation* works for a wide client base, spread over many industries, I have developed a range of services that are of particular relevance to Housing Associations.

Are any of the following scenarios familiar from your own organisation?

- People in your organisation are not as skilled as they should be, and you struggle with providing training opportunities that have a real, lasting impact on their performance.
- People in your organisation don't like attending meetings – whether internal, or with partners or stakeholders. They are seen as boring and ineffective, and never result in any real action. Everybody questions the time and effort invested in meetings.
- The relationship between the Board and the executive staff is 'hard work', and both sides struggle to see the real impact of the Board on the work of the organisation. Efforts are made to improve the Board's performance, but Board members fail to embrace such attempts.
- Your organisation faces a constant turnover of staff, both at managerial and frontline level. As soon as you have trained new recruits properly, and they start to perform well, they move on. Experienced staff members, too, move on – perhaps because you have no effective career development or succession planning. Valuable knowledge and expertise leaves the organisation with them, negatively affecting the quality of services you deliver. The remaining staff is overworked, and morale plummets while your expenditure for recruitment and induction training skyrockets.
- You are drowning in requests to produce 'just one more' policy, strategy or performance report on 'key issues'. Complying with these requirements takes up valuable resources, resources that you may feel would be better spent on delivering 'ground level' services.

- Departments and teams in your organisation fail to work together effectively. Instead, you have inefficient and dysfunctional 'silos', with low staff morale and plenty of conflicts between people. Managers are tied up sorting these 'issues', rather than concentrating on increasing performance and ensuring delivery of targets. Your experience of working in partnership with other Housing Associations, private developers and various stakeholders is similar - it feels that you are putting in more than you are getting out.

If any of the above seems familiar, then please read on to find out how Knowledge Generation can help you in tackling those challenges. This document outlines various services I provide, and suggests where clients may benefit from their use.

If you would like further details on any of the following, then please get in touch. I am always happy to discuss requirements, problems and potential solutions.

Career Development and Succession Planning

Staff turnover is a natural part of any organisation's life cycle. A certain level of staff turnover can even be beneficial, as it rejuvenates the staff pool and enables you to introduce people with new skills and ideas.

However, it can also have a negative effect on your business performance, especially if leavers are taking with them crucial knowledge and experience. Implementing Knowledge Retention (as outlined below) with leavers can help to limit the damage to the organisation, but it goes without saying that it is far more efficient to stop the individual from leaving in the first place. Career Development and Succession Planning can help to achieve this.

Housing Associations usually have some staff development programmes in place, often linked to appraisal systems and training policies. The track record is much worse with regard to Succession Planning. Honest discussions with staff, about career paths open to them within the organisation, often don't take place – sometimes for fear of having to admit that opportunities will be limited, especially with regard to managerial positions.

Lack of Succession Planning puts your organisation at a double risk. Firstly, because of a lack of clear career paths, key employees may lack commitment and be tempted to look for new employment that seems to offer better prospects. Secondly, the organisation misses the chance to assess the risk of gaps appearing within its employment structure if key people leave.

How Knowledge Generation can help you:

Effective Succession Planning identifies those professionals who may be leaving, and whose knowledge and skills will therefore need to be replaced. It will also identify those with the potential to fill critical positions. Usually, it is a win-win situation for both employee and employer if both are willing to be honest about aspirations and opportunities.

Knowledge Generation can help you by reviewing and improving your appraisal system, and by advising you on your Succession Planning strategies.

If you have already identified those managers and professionals who have the skills and knowledge most critical to your organisation's future, then I can work with them in a 1:1 coaching relationship. This will ensure effective career development that benefits both the organisation and the individual.

In addition to general Career Development Coaching, I offer two related specialist coaching services:

- 'Knowledge Coaching', for those who want to evaluate their 'personal capital', in terms of knowledge, expertise and skills, and then to make more efficient use of it, either within their current employment or beyond.
- Career Development and Leadership Coaching for women.

Knowledge Retention – Managing the Loss of Vital Resources

High staff-turnover rates are one of the biggest challenges for Housing Associations. They not only affect an organisation's ability to deliver quality services, but also consume valuable resources due to incessant recruitment and training activities.

More dramatically, though, it means that there is a constant drain of valuable knowledge, skills and expertise from the organisation – not only at managerial level. This affects all areas of operation because of:

- the loss of Housing Officers with valuable experience on how to get tenants to pay their rent, or who deal well with anti-social behaviour;
- the loss of Development Managers who have built up crucial relationships with the Housing Corporation, Local Authorities or Private Developers, or who know about good land deals;
- the loss of Sheltered Housing Managers who know all about that idiosyncratic heating system that keeps breaking down – leaving your tenants to freeze and adding to the frustration of your maintenance staff;
- or the loss of popular call centre staff who are the 'friendly face of your organisation' because they manage to keep tenants happy and calm in times of crisis ... the list is endless.

Each individual piece of knowledge or experience may seem easy to replace – but it isn't. New, qualified employees, even if possible to find, lack experience. At best, effort and costs are required to replace knowledge and expertise; at worst, the gaps cannot be closed at all.

How Knowledge Generation can help you:

Knowledge Generation offers a range of tools and services that can help you to reduce knowledge loss by retaining it within your organisation. Such tools may include structured, knowledge-focused exit interviews for those employees leaving your organisation, ensuring that their accumulated knowledge and expertise doesn't leave when they do. Exit interviews can be supplemented by 'job hand-over' tool kits, including a variety of checklists and schedules. They will help leavers to document

and share their knowledge and expertise, thereby allowing new recruits to 'hit the ground running'.

For tools to be effective, they need to take into account your specific situation and requirements with regard to Knowledge Retention – please get in touch for a discussion and assessment to see what will work best for you.

Exploring, Selecting and Implementing New Forms of Learning and Training

A Housing Association's performance is highly dependant on the quality and motivation of its staff. Creating and maintaining a highly skilled workforce is a veritable challenge, especially when one considers the current recruitment and retention problems in the sector.

The provision of training for staff and Board members is often not very effective even if staff development programmes and training policies are in place. This is because there is a range of challenges which includes: analysing training needs accurately, making sure people can attend training in the light of pressures at work and at home, and finding financial resources. The ultimate challenge is to make sure that people actually use their skills on the job, rather than just 'leaving their training manuals on the shelf'.

How Knowledge Generation can help you:

I offer advice and guidance on how your organisation can increase learning and skill development for itself and among your employees. This could take the form of reviewing your training policies and practices, or improving your appraisal system.

An area of special expertise for *Knowledge Generation* is to advise organisations on the effective use of *new* forms of learning and training: peer-to-peer learning, coaching and mentoring, or collaborative learning solutions (communities of practice, training partnerships).

As a trained online tutor, I am particularly keen to advise and support organisations that want to explore e-learning opportunities.

Efficient and Effective Boards

Efficient Boards or committees are of crucial importance to the performance of a Housing Association. It is not only in the self-interest of a Housing Association to improve the performance of individual Board members, and of the Board as a team, but Board ineffectiveness is still one of the most common reasons why organisations get into trouble with the regulating body

Accordingly, 'performance management for Board members' has gained greater importance over the last few years, with various attempts made to increase Board efficiency by applying tools like appraisals and development activities.

Unfortunately, many of these activities are not very popular with those who are in the centre of them all – Board members themselves. They often resist attempts to

appraise, or 'develop' them, thus weakening any attempts to create better, more efficient Boards.

How Knowledge Generation can help you:

Knowledge Generation's ultimate goal is to offer an integrated approach to Board member recruitment and development.

The first element of this approach is a new method for Board performance management and Board member appraisals: 'Knowledge and Personal Capital Mapping and Review'. It aims to reduce prevailing resistance and create new working relationships between Board members and their organisation.

'Knowledge and Personal Capital Mapping' helps to assess the skills, expertise and interests of Board members more accurately. The main difference from other forms of appraisal is that it applies a more appreciative style – one that signals value and appreciation, rather than doubting performance. As it also creates performance targets for the organisation (by requiring it to make best use of Board members' knowledge and skills) it adds a second performance issue to the equation, one where Board members can hold the organisation accountable for its performance.

The 'Knowledge and Personal Capital Mapping' approach is currently under development and several tools and techniques are being tested with Housing Association Boards. If you want to take part in one of the trials – or be one of the first to apply this new approach to the management of Board members – then please get in touch for a detailed discussion.

Effective Collaboration In Teams and Partnerships

Teamwork, and working in successful partnerships, remain the ultimate advantages in a competitive corporate environment. This is because good teams and alliances can achieve and deliver more than the sum of their individuals could ever do.

Housing Associations are full of teams at all levels of operation. Those teams are often small, they are constantly changing in composition, and they are always responsible for the delivery of key services. Over the last few years, various forms of collaborative working, via partnerships, groups and alliances, have also gained importance.

Unfortunately, for most Housing Associations, as well as other companies, the reality is that functioning and effective teams remain an unrealised goal. Many teams and partnerships fail to achieve high performance or to add value to the organisation. They are often dysfunctional, which is usually the result of being made of imperfect human beings!

However, it is a mistake to believe that teams and partnerships are doomed. Developing better teams and partnerships is actually quite simple, but takes time and commitment from the people involved. Attending to the root causes of the problems – like lack of trust and dysfunctional relationships – is the first step to improving team morale and working relationships.

How Knowledge Generation can help you:

I plan and deliver various team and partnership development programmes, endeavouring to design solutions that are tailored to your needs and which result in sustainable improvements. They are suitable for many types of teams, like work teams within the organisation, your Board, and groups involving external partners.

Changing a 'dysfunctional' team or partnership into a 'well-functioning' one is a multi-stage process. Initially it involves an assessment of the purpose and challenges of the team. This is followed by a programme of activities designed to increase the effectiveness and performance of the group. It is paramount to address issues concerning trust and conflict, accountability, and goal orientation. The ultimate aim is to enhance the ability of team members to share and use knowledge more effectively.

My role in that process is as a facilitator or 'enabler', supporting teams and partnerships with tools and techniques they can use independently to develop a new practice of working together. The team leader, who will be instigating and driving change, plays the main role in this change process.

This approach is delivered by using a tailored mix of methods, including working in a group-setting, and implementing one-to-one coaching for those leading teams, or for those leading partnerships or for those involved in any other collaborative working projects.

Knowledge Generation delivers team development solutions in collaboration with a range of partners who have a background in HR, conflict resolution and theatre & drama.

Knowledge Auditing and Knowledge Mapping

The pressure on Housing Associations to prove their performance is extremely high. The current inspection and regulation regimes require an organisation to monitor itself constantly to produce new policies, strategies, reports and statements. This is labour- and time-intensive, and ties up valuable resources.

The workload could be considerably reduced if there were a better awareness for 'who knows what' in your organisation. This refers to documented knowledge (policies, procedures, etc.) as well as people's practical knowledge and expertise.

Take a subject like 'Housing for Black and Minority Ethnic Communities' and imagine the benefits of knowing which people in your organisation have all the information and knowledge about it – including statistics, policies and the practical experience of dealing with BME tenants. You could use those resources quickly and efficiently to pull together a report about the current state of Equality & Diversity in your organisation.

Unfortunately, the reality often looks different, with staff trailing through dispersed documents and information sources, unable to lay hands on the really important material.

How Knowledge Generation can help you:

In order to save valuable time when assessing your performance, or reviewing old policies and procedures and drawing up new ones, you need to know what knowledge and information your organisation has, where it is located, and how it can be accessed.

A Knowledge Auditing or Knowledge Mapping project can help you to achieve just that.

Knowledge Mapping and Knowledge Auditing solutions are delivered in collaboration with Bob Bater from Infoplex Associates, a leading national expert in this area. He has delivered efficient solutions for organisations in the UK and abroad.

Planning and Facilitating Events and Meetings

Meetings that are poorly organised can waste the participants' valuable time and energy. They can also fail to realise their objective.

To avoid these problems it is essential to choose the right format and 'tools' for meetings and events.

How Knowledge Generation can help you:

Knowledge Generation has the skills and experience to organise and facilitate productive meetings for all types of people, including staff, tenants, business partners, stakeholders, and various combinations thereof.

Knowledge Generation even has the expertise to enable 'online' interactions such as web-conferencing, thereby increasing efficiency even further by going beyond the (often limiting) format of face-to-face meetings.

In many cases the first step to improving meetings and events is to find out what is wrong with the current format you are using. A range of tools and techniques can be used to analyse dysfunctional meetings and to identify development needs.