



Name & Role

Sean Canning is the UK Operations Director for Firstsource Solutions in Belfast & Londonderry.

Organisation

Firstsource is a Business Process Outsourcing company established in 2001 in India that has grown rapidly to 17,000 employees worldwide. From an initial base of one operational centre in Bangalore, it now has 36 global centres.

The centre set up its first UK centre in Belfast in July 2006, quickly followed by Londonderry which opened in September 2006. They are now approaching 1,000 staff in the two centres; the majority of employees have been recruited locally.

Management Development

There is a strong desire to develop staff and in Northern Ireland their approach is to create an internal learning and development culture and as part of individual performance review, and to encourage promotion from within.

The HR team explores with individuals their longer term career aspirations and where possible equips staff with additional skills or work related experiences that will assist in developing a longer term future with the organisation. It is important that these objectives are upheld throughout the organisation in all the operational centres and are promoted and driven from senior management downwards.

Sean states *"We aim to engage our line managers in 'people management' and equip them with the skills to demonstrate to the organisation the benefits of engaging their people, getting business results and improving quality for the clients"*.

Before M&L Development – Triggers

Firstsource appreciates the importance of well trained managers at all levels and was keen to identify and fill any skills/ gaps to ensure that its staff were equipped to fulfil their roles. With a largely diverse workforce in terms of previous experience, Firstsource had to instil a 'new' learning and development culture into its Northern Ireland operations, in order to achieve the levels of performance required by a successful global organisation.

Management & Leadership Development Activity

Focusing on key management levels, Firstsource has implemented a comprehensive learning and development programme, with a recognised accreditation, to equip staff to carry out their roles and fulfil their potential.

In particular, Team Leaders and the Operations Management Team, including HR and Resource Planning, are gaining management and leadership skills to enable them to deal with the traditional challenges of working in a contact centre. These challenges can include agent engagements, attrition and absenteeism, as well as how to motivate and encourage best performance from team members.

With reference to the Derry site, the organisation committed to training all managerial (first & second line) staff in the first year of its operation and a 12 week management programme was completed in December 2007. The programme covers such areas as:

- Developing Yourself as a Leader
- Performance Management
- Workplace Communication
- Dealing with Conflict
- Motivating the Team to Perform
- Coaching

All employees completed learning logs and/or reflective diaries based on the topics covered and were asked to show how these were implemented with teams on the call floor. These logs were in turn discussed with immediate line managers who act as coaches and mentors

To reinforce Firstsource's focus on process business improvement, all Team Leaders are undertaking Six Sigma Yellow Belt projects relevant to their particular roles. As Six Sigma projects are designed to have a direct impact on the business and these projects will significantly contribute to improved business processes and performance.

Actions, Outcomes and Benefits

Within a relatively short time frame considerable steps have been taken to create an environment to promote professional development for all levels of staff. All staff members now have an individual learning and development plan that will help to map their career within Firstsource. Staff training is not limited to their current role in the company, but they can acquire new skills to allow them the opportunity to move up within the company. An example would be employees who started as customer support advisors have now moved into payroll, resource planning or quality functions.

Staff have been able to do skills exchange on an international level. Employees transferred from India to Northern Ireland have shared expertise, particularly on quality and Six Sigma process improvements. Several members of the Northern Ireland staff have also taken the journey to spend time in Firstsource centres in India to learn new skills or to share their knowledge with colleagues.

Leadership Style

Firstsource UK has grown rapidly since opening its doors in Northern Ireland and has maintained a holistic approach to learning and development to enable staff to develop their true potential within the organisation.

Barriers to Improving Management Skills

In a business environment that operates 7 days a week from 8am to 11pm, time management is always a challenge. It is important to ensure that staff who take on projects with the aim of developing their career are supported and assisted to complete their objectives and learning aims.