



IPD People Management Award 2000
The start-up Host induction and service
programme for the Dome at Greenwich

THE DOME AT GREENWICH: LARGE SCALE LEARNING FOR SERVICE

Background

The Dome at Greenwich was completed to tight timescales during 1999. It is the most exciting concentration of high quality visitor attractions ever brought together under one roof, consisting of 14 exhibition zones around a central performance arena.

The Dome will only be open for a year and in that time is expecting to receive the largest number of visitors of any attraction in the UK with the aim that everyone who visits has “One Amazing Day”.



The New Millennium Experience Company, which was established to run the whole project, has a stated mission to:

- Create, build and operate a Millennium experience for the UK that attracts, entertains, educates and involves visitors and participants.
- Seek, through the Millennium experience, to influence positively each individual’s view of themselves and the world’s view of the nation.

Our Purpose

In early September 1999, a Training Manager was appointed and invited to develop a strategy and “orchestrate” the delivery of an induction and training process for the Visitor Service Team. This team would ‘host’ the visitors to the Dome with the aim of providing an exemplary visitor experience and achieving total public acclaim.

This project involved creating a shared vision across all those involved to:

- Develop a work environment where inspired individuals work together as one team
- Provide innovative learning approaches that focused on enabling every individual to become an appropriately skilled, highly motivated and professional member of the team.

The ultimate aim was to create a culture where every individual sees

learning and serving as relevant and enjoyable – something they take responsibility for, value and share with others.



Outcomes -A matter of principle

We opted to develop and use a unique set of service principles. These were co-created with the initial team of Visitor Service Managers, their colleagues from Retail and some of the Special Visits service team who had been recruited early. The ownership and relevance of these 7 Service Principles significantly impacted the process and acted as a guide for the innovative design and delivery of the learning process around service.

We focused on the learners needs and the wisdom and experiences they brought with them to bring the Service Principles to life. Coupled with highly participative large-scale approaches this worked to build through the system as new groups arrived, creating the shared experience of One Amazing Team.

The Dome has a great deal of press coverage and one thing which runs through it all is high praise for the efficiency, attentiveness, approachability and friendliness of the hosts. The media editor of the Financial Times, James Harding, wrote to the Director of Operations saying:

“ No doubt there will be plenty of views about the Dome, the zones and the show. But, for me, the best thing about it was the people: The yellow jackets. Everyone I met working at the Dome, whether at the gates or around the zones or directing people about the place, was fun, warm, friendly and helpful, without being cheesy about it. If the people working at the Dome are representative of what people in Britain are going to be like in the next Millennium, then we're in for a grand 1,000 years. Please pass on my thanks.”



After 3 months of operation, despite significant management changes and ongoing generally negative media, an independent customer satisfaction survey reported that 91% of the public rated the service at the Dome as good or excellent. This is just one example of levels of reported service way above any experienced at any visitor attraction both in London or globally.

The Team and the Work -“Like hanging on to the wings of Concorde”

The team who worked on this project were a highly diverse group of internal and external trainers and consultants from a range of organisations. They came together and collaborated effectively through a strong sense of shared values and principles around individual and organisational learning. The mission embodies their commitment to learner led approaches which draw out the wisdom and potential of all. The project team, in every sense, worked to exemplify the learning and service principles that they were a catalyst for.

The speed was immense. Over a 10 week period from September 27th 1999 the Visitor Services team grew from 25 to over 1000 people. In various large groups (50, 120, 80 and 800) they experienced a process of “Discovering the Difference”. They worked together to create the context, principles, management behaviours and overall strategy required to provide exemplary Visitor Service.

As each new group joined they supported the learning process for the next group culminating in the world’s largest ever interactive induction programme with 2000 Hosts and Service providers such as catering, cleaning, security, London transport and Chaplains on 29th November 1999.

At all stages the project addressed the potential for co-creation and the ways in which people could bring their whole selves into the experience. Designs for the meetings and training sessions were deliberately crafted to include the opportunity to access information and learn using the full range of intelligences and brain-based learning techniques. A full analysis of preferences for taking in information revealed a high collective level of preference for Bodily/Physical, Interpersonal and Musical approaches to learning. As a result, the Service Principles were developed as movements and put to music for all 2000 staff to join in with.

The programme content included significant exploration of issues such as access for the disabled, going beyond the physical provision and addressing the more fundamental issues of appreciation of diversity. Trainers with a variety of disabilities contributed and training was designed to be accessible to all of the hosts who had declared a disability of some form. They then contributed to further tailor the experience to their needs - as they became more engaged their contributions offered memorable moments for facilitators and participants alike.

Key Events	September	October	November	December
Strategy Developed				
Service Principles Developed				
AVSM Training 50 people				
Senior Host Training 120 people				
Pathfinder Host Training 50 people				
Whole Team Sessions 240 people				
Host Training 2000, and 1000 people				

As each group of people arrived they became the resources for supporting the design and delivery for the next group. The design work for the Host training also involved teams from many of the sponsor organisations, experts in service skills and trainers from the Employment service with experience in facilitation of large groups. Each design had a clear purpose and outcomes related to the group of participants involved and many of the designs were iterative improvements of the previous designs.

Each event had its individual purpose however the overall purpose was:

To create the experience of one huge team with clear shared responsibilities, consistent service principles and a sense of the excitement and enormous possibility of working at The Millennium Dome

Outline designs

Each of the designs (other than the initial VSM session) had the same basic flow to it

- **Connection** – discovering the similarities and differences in each others stories and beginning to build our own collective story

- **Virtual Tour** – discovering the difference and possibility presented by working at the Dome. Looking at the operational structure and the work involved.
- **Service Principles** – exploring what service means to us and what the service principles could mean for working together as a team with shared leadership and a focus on our Mission for exemplary service and total public acclaim.
- **Skills Sessions** – discovery of the skills needed for our role - including learning to learn, teamwork, leadership, flow management, challenging situations, communications etc.
- **Safety and Security** – detailed discovery of the essential lessons in securing public safety in a large-scale visitor attraction including some in depth first aid for many.
- **Access for the Disabled** – building a sense of the nature of access and how people demonstrate it. Working in large groups with trainers from various voluntary organisations.
- **Job Specific Sessions** – working in teams to learn the essential operational elements of delivering and hosting.

Hosts who have now been operating for several months have reported the significant impact of the process enabling them to get to know and trust a number of people on other teams across the organisation.

By involving the management and staff incrementally in the roll out of the service principles and induction learning, they developed a sense of caring for each other and used the experiences they had valued to create continuous improvements in the learning environments for the new teams. The development of the capability of the internal team enabled the whole process to keep the external cost to a minimum and has created a legacy of commitment towards ongoing learning and development as the project has evolved.

The project has demonstrated the importance of collaborative development of a compelling and flexible framework of core principles, which enable individuality and yet capture the imagination and commitment of the whole team. The evidence, so far, acknowledged by even the most critical of the UK press, is that it works. Charles Spencer writes in the Daily Telegraph of the New Year's eve opening:

“Nor have I ever experienced better service at a public event. The staff were exceptionally helpful, smiling figures who seemed genuinely to care that people were having a good time”.

Major difficulties/barriers to overcome?

The main barriers were philosophical, logistical, time and media related.

Philosophical – *Expectations of traditional training delivery versus latest thinking about learning and what was possible with the numbers and the timescales.*

A strong foundation needed to be quickly developed with:

- The internal training team – to gain their support, develop their skills in latest learning methods and large scale participation and create a shared vision
- The internal management group – to gain their confidence and support for a fairly high risk approach to learning on a large scale
- Other external consultants and sponsors whose support would be needed and who needed to believe that such a venture was not only possible but would be successful.



This involved creating a strategy with the key internal players and persuading those who had only experienced more traditional induction and customer care training methods of the value of whole system, large scale participation.

There were no precedents to refer to but there was a sense that the Dome represented a “ground breaking” project setting new ways of working and learning for the new millennium.

Logistical – Conducting leading edge learner focused programmes on a building site!

Creating a training plan which required access to different spaces at different times that were not yet built together with the need for support from catering outlets not yet operational represented a major difficulty. Organising the training activities required continuous checking with site management and continuous compromising of standards regarding acceptable venues. It was however, more effective and less costly to run the majority of the induction programmes on site.

Staff, as they joined, went through an interesting transition from complaining about the lack of heat, food, drink etc. to a realisation that the team were doing as much as they could, to a sense of shared responsibility for the difficulties. There was a fine line between what was acceptable and what might have been demotivational during this period. Continuous participant focus and feedback was necessary to monitor levels of team and individual morale and ensure that the conditions were not undermining the impact of the learning.

Time – ironically time was a critical unit of currency in a project based on the Meridian line

There is no doubt that the punishing timescales and the enormity of the task was not only a great cause for concern but also a major driver, creating a sense of urgency, excitement and momentum. The critical path for the recruitment and training process was very well worked out to achieve a “just in time” state of readiness for the opening night on 31st December.

Media – the press coverage of the project, in itself, became a factor that needed to be considered as part of preparing staff for such a high profile role

With regard to the Training – it was an instinctive decision to minimise the press involvement. Reporters had asked to be involved in the training for the Big Week – with 2000 people starting on 29th November. However, it seemed inappropriate at the time to “hype” the training because it was something that needed to be safe, secure and special to the individuals involved – not a media circus.

It subsequently transpired that it was a good call. The press that were allowed to attend subsequent training sessions reported the whole experience with the same element of cynicism that characterised their general view of the Dome. The reporting lacked any depth of understanding about what was going on or empathy and respect for those involved. There was little interest in the process of the learning and the subsequent value and impact individually, collectively and organisationally.

Key insights and learnings

Letting go of and sharing responsibility for the learning process

From the first group of AVSM’s, and the realisation of the sheer numbers involved, each group was encouraged to share responsibility for their own learning and that of those following them. The first

group of AVSM's was invited to join us in reviewing the evaluations of the first day. In realising we were serious about wanting to focus on their needs and make this programme work they were engaged in sharing responsibility with us. From then on we found that the system became able to test itself and redesign in real time.

The design task was so great it was essential to ask the previous group to be part of the design team for the next. This additional sharing of responsibility supported the iterative development of the designs for larger groups and experimentation of ideas for the very large host session in the pathfinder sessions.

The necessity of designing and running sessions in parallel provided important connections between designs. This was at its most exciting when the whole team event was held at the beginning of November. The AVSM's designing it wanted to get to know each other better and do real work. The obvious task which all of them shared was the first day of the host week when 2000 people would be arriving. So a teambuilding session also became a design team meeting with detailed planning of the processes to ensure the 2000 people would have an amazing day.

Living and breathing the principles

Living the principles in the design and delivery of the sessions was an essential part of integrating them into the way people thought. Empowering the early groups to participate fully in later sessions was important so they were given time to explore the conceptual models we were using in terms of learning and large group dynamics. We developed a strong foundation of a shared vision of what it possible and a real energy and compelling sense of wanting to achieve something innovative and fresh.



Jazz not orchestration

At the outset, The Human Resources Director had used the metaphor of needing a conductor – someone who could amass the right people and orchestrate the whole training experience. In reality the time and cost constraints meant there was little time for detailed scores and scripts to be written, or practice sessions to be held. The process was more one of enabling Jazz than orchestrating and conducting Classical music. Different soloists came together – found a combined rhythm and improvised. What made it good was the constant rhythm of the learning principles and the service principles guiding the play. Instead of a standardised approach to training people – which tends to be exclusively owned by those with the scripts – there was an inclusive approach to everyone bringing their voice and diverse talents and making music together.

From a facilitation point of view, it was essential that each facilitator was an expert in their own right – they could really hit the right chords. However, they also had to be able to be participant focused – compose their work to meet the needs of the learners and be collaborative in their design and delivery. There was no room for impresarios or virtuosos trying to steal the show. The spotlight was on the whole not on the individual. The collective harmonies and tunes achieved were strongly heard, felt and remembered.