



Contract and Relationship Management (CRMGT) Project Critical Friends' Scheme

Protocol

1. Background

The CRMGT project seeks to address the issues identified in contract and relationship management practice by the status review. The programme of work to support the delivery of improvements to CRMGT in London includes disseminating best practice through a number of means including a critical friends' scheme.

It is intended that participants in the programme will be managers in London local authorities who are responsible for major contracts and contractual relationships, drawn from social care, waste, leisure services, street scene and other public service sectors. Initial attention will be focused on strategically important relationships such as PFI contracts and other public-private or strategic partnerships.

The complete permeation of best CRMGT practice across London cannot be attained overnight. This pilot critical friends' scheme is intended to complement collaborative group work between London Boroughs, by sharing best practice on a one-to-one basis as a prelude to lasting cultural change.

2. Definitions

Critical Friend

In essence, the process involves a one-to-one relationship between two critical friends, where one shares their experiences with another and helps them examine the choices open to them. This assists participants' growth and encourages them to take responsibility for their own development. Critical friends are not normally responsible for their counterpart in any other capacity e.g. line manager.

Critical friendship can take place on an informal or formal basis either face-to-face or by electronic means.

Co-ordinator

The scheme co-ordinator supports the pairing of critical friends and aids participants in monitoring and evaluating the scheme.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the CRMGT critical friends' scheme are:

- Sharing best practice in contract and relationship management
- Aiding contract managers to identify problems and to deal with the underlying causes
- Raising aspirations
- Developing confidence and self-motivation
- Developing competencies

- Developing career or education
- Assisting individuals in the attainment of a specific goal.

For critical friends, benefits can include:

- Personal development
- Enhanced coaching, counselling and listening skills
- Personal satisfaction
- An opportunity to exercise creativity and best practice
- Extended professional/community networks
- An opportunity to share knowledge and skills.

4. Confidentiality

Trust and effective critical friendship can only be fostered if participants are confident that what they disclose in their one-to-one session is confidential. All participants should agree both the need for absolute confidentiality and the seriousness with which a breach of confidentiality is viewed.

People may be reluctant to share information which might, if known to other managers, hold them back in their career or if they think confidences may go further. It is extremely important that all participants feel they can trust their critical friend. Any problem should be raised in confidence with the co-ordinator.

5. Commitment

Participants are asked to consider their commitment on a par with their other work commitments.

Critical friends are elected on a voluntary basis and it is recognized that as managers they will have a heavy workload. Participants are advised to invest approximately two hours for each session – one for the meeting and one for both preparation and recording of progress.

The frequency of sessions should be agreed between participants but it is recommended that, as a minimum, a session should be held once every two months. The co-ordinator will ask participants to review the scheme formally after six months, or such other suitable period as may be agreed.

6. Meetings

The co-ordinator will arrange the first meeting between critical friends. Responsibility for arranging subsequent sessions rests with the participants.

Participants are kindly requested to inform the co-ordinator when subsequent meetings are arranged and when they have taken place or if a meeting is cancelled.

7. Good practice

Critical friends should:

- Meet where they can talk privately. That said, the venue for meetings may be agreed between critical friends.

- Give each other feedback at the appropriate times so that the sessions can be fully effective.
- Inform the co-ordinator in confidence of any problem as it arises.

7. Evaluating

Simply put evaluation means measuring what has changed as a result of the scheme and by how much. Evaluating the scheme concerns measuring its success and the impact it has had on critical friends and their organisations.

At the start of the scheme critical friends should document their goals for their participation. After six months or such other suitable period as may be agreed, critical friends will be asked to identify whether they have met their goals. In this way, critical friends can see what they have done and can identify further areas that they need to work on.

8. Monitoring

The co-ordinator will monitor the scheme, in particular:

1. How regularly participants meet
2. Whether participants are encountering problems in meeting/emailing their partners
4. Any problems that may arise with the process
5. Areas for improvement within the scheme.

Source Material: *The Mentoring Resource Pack* developed by the Balance Project, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and led by Loughborough University.

<http://www.ltsneng.ac.uk/er/resources/>