

Administrative Appeals Tribunal, Australia

The Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) has seven offices operating across Australia and provides independent review on the merits of a wide range of administrative decisions made by the Australian Government and some non-government bodies. In each District Registry, a Deputy President or Senior Member is appointed Executive Deputy President. The Executive Deputy President and the District Registrar are responsible for local registry management.

The role of the District Registrar is typical of a senior manager's position with responsibility of staff management; retaining good communication and cooperation between administration and judicial systems; responsibility for overall management of the state office; engagement of internal and external stakeholders as well as contributing to the national body of policy and operations.

In more recent years the AAT has focused on a long-term training and development strategy in-line with the Australian Public Sector leadership and management development strategy. AAT is increasingly interested in organisational development and equipping its leaders and managers with sustainable management and leadership capabilities.

The District Registrars (group of 7) have been using CoachingOurselves as a management development tool since 2011. They first met face to face with Monica Redden, Australian Partner, CoachingOurselves International, who provided an overview and assisted with facilitating the first topic. Since then the District Registrars have met monthly on teleconference and more recently videoconference with two face to face sessions when they have met at national seminars. The following includes comments from Ms Athena Harris Ingall, Learning and Development Manager and some of the participant District Registrars.

Before CoachingOurselves

It is not that we wouldn't ever get together before, we use to have hook-ups and things, but CoachingOurselves has given us a way to have guided discussion. It focuses our thinking and the sharing of our experiences on a particular topic so that we can get some easy input from the topics but more importantly some fabulous experienced-based input from each other. District Registrar.

Those of us who were friendly with each other relied on each other, CoachingOurselves has pulled everyone into the group and because of the way it is structured people participate. District Registrar.

We were pretty much operating in a silo, there was some interaction between District Registrars depending on your personal relationships that you had developed over a period of time, but other than that it was fairly limited contact. District Registrar.

I was looking for a tool that was sophisticated, but easy to use and would challenge these managers who are working in a legal environment to expand their knowledge on organisational management practices. I wanted a more sustainable strategy for organisational development to equip leaders and managers with requisite skills to manage and cope with their increasingly demanding jobs. Athena Harris Ingall, L&D Manager.

CoachingOurselves Sessions

Those in the group that are more reluctant are encouraged to participate and share their strengths and skills. The structure of the topic means that everyone has to be engaged.

The group reflects at the start of each session on how they have put things into practice since the last session; some are better at doing this than others. District Registrar.

I like the fact that a group of managers who are regionally located around the country can come together once a month and talk about a relevant management issue and share each other's ideas

and get input from each other, it is just fantastic. District Registrar.

It is very difficult to keep connected when everyone is so far apart, we meet face to face very rarely, CoachingOurselves gives us an opportunity, with the video conferencing, to talk with each other and see each other. District Registrar.

People are accessing and learning information for their own immediate use. Athena Harris Ingall, L&D Manager.

Topics that have been particularly useful...

Introducing Culture in Organisations (by Sharon Turnbull) was really good, particularly as we are about to implement the new jurisdiction and we need to look really carefully at change and the impact culture has on change. District Registrar.

Reflection (by Jonathan Gosling) was a great topic and really interesting, it made us all pause and think. The Rewards of Recognition (by John Oliver) was good; I think that does not happen enough in workplaces both for us and for our staff-upwards and downwards and inwards and outwards-it was very good. District Registrar.

The recent topic on Beyond Bullying (by Marilyn Aitkenhead) was very good; you would think as a manager that would be something you would already have in your kitbag of knowledge-but it was really good to review and reflect and made me act differently to a situation I had, it was very useful. District Registrar.

The subject matter is fairly open. It has given us a forum more than anything. The subjects that we are choosing are things that we all struggle with or need assistance with from time to time. It gives us the ability to openly air our thoughts and listen to other people's thoughts; you get some good ideas through those discussions. District Registrar.

It has made a difference

It is a really good management tool. It makes us more strategic. It gives us ideas and gives us a forum to discuss things; we just seem to develop strategies that we can move forward with. District Registrar.

There are opportunities in CoachingOurselves to think about ways you can do things differently. It is up to you and whether you do them or not. For example, there has been some discussion on how people communicate and relate to each other and we have been able to bring different things and processes to our staff meetings and this has really helped. District Registrar.

There is a greater feeling of camaraderie developed as a result. District Registrar.

We are much more collegiate. We realise we all have different problems but the same problems in terms of managing the registries and although the registries are different there are common themes. District Registrar.

It has helped me as a manager...

It has given me an opportunity to explore topics that I am interested in and given me greater knowledge about those topics, but particularly as it relates to this environment. It has also given me the opportunity to tap into the wisdom of my colleagues and their strategies for dealing with things which is really relevant to the workplace. District Registrar.

I feel supported by my colleagues because I can talk about issues. They have issues too, so I feel less alone. You can target to make it work for you and your workplace. District Registrar.

Value for Money

It has been very good value in comparison with external training courses. Where someone in Perth cannot get access to training and has to travel to Sydney, it costs as much for one course as it does for an annual license of CO. District Registrar.

It is extremely good value for money for the content and the impact it has. After the very positive feedback and experience of the District Registrars the program was expanded to other groups. Athena Ingall-Harris, L&D Manager.

Advice to other managers...

It is a really good tool. It feels from the outside maybe an hour and half is a lot; but really the benefit that you get is well worth the investment that you make. It is not particularly costly, but it really builds relationships between colleagues and develops skills and provides examples and input. District Registrar

It is a really good tool. You can make it apply to your own situation and your own workplace. It develops a greater sense of collegiality. Those in the group that are more reluctant are encouraged to participate and share their strengths and skills. District Registrar

One of the important things to do (lesson for others) was to properly prepare participants about the content that can be found in the CoachingOurselves topics and the role of the facilitators in the group. We did this through the expertise of a trained facilitator (Monica Redden).

We found it very important to set timeframes and timing of meetings which are conducted on a monthly basis and never more than 90 minutes.

It is also useful to have a champion for implementation of the program, who is a senior manager, who can encourage or support the groups. Once people engage with the program and start to obtain real advantage of the group and apply it to their own workplace, they are keen to maintain the schedule of meetings, even with their very busy and challenging workload. Athena Ingall-Harris, L&D Manager.

Summary

This case study is interesting for a number of reasons. It demonstrates the flexibility of CoachingOurselves such as adapting to teleconference and video conference sessions and also the money that can be saved by not paying costs for travel, accommodation and time lost. It also highlights the real value of meeting together and strengthening the sense of collegiality and collaboration. Some of the examples where direct change has occurred as a result of a specific topic such as Beyond Bullying and Organisational Culture show how participants are selecting topics to meet their specific needs and interests and generating discussion that fits their organisation. Participants became more confident as they did more topics; participants are drilling down into issues through the sessions and recognised they have become more strategic and decisive. An important lesson for CoachingOurselves is the importance of providing good information about topics and to encourage participants to ask for assistance on topics that might be of interest relative to issues the managers are grappling with.

For more information on CoachingOurselves contact Monica Redden Consultancy www.monicaaddenconsultancy.com.au or +61 8 8357 1296

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