

London Borough of Hillingdon

Hillingdon Council has adopted DMA as an organisational development and design tool, using it to look at things in a different way and challenge assumptions about the council's structure.

When Hillingdon's human resources (HR) team first heard about it, they were looking for an organisational design tool, model or idea that would provide a robust challenge to the way things had been done in the past. DMA seemed to be a good fit. Encouraged by the results from the LGA's pilot programme, Hillingdon decided to embed the approach by training 12 staff from the HR and business improvement teams in the DMA process and theory.

Mike Talbot, HR and Organisational Development Service Manager, explains: "Rather than using DMA for a one-off review, we use it as an organisational development and design tool to challenge some of our own assumptions around what would be seen as the 'usual' local authority structure."

One area that has changed significantly as a result is social care services, which underwent a full DMA review from the front-line to director level. The review highlighted a close similarity in the responsibilities of team managers and deputy team managers. As a result, the level of deputy team manager was removed and a new specialist role of advanced practitioner was introduced. This has been seen as a positive change by staff and managers, leading to more efficient decision making as social workers and their managers now work more closely together.

Mike Talbot says DMA can kick-start conversations around the roles and responsibilities of staff and has created a common language across the organisation. For example, the council has become more adept at challenging layers of roles that have historically been seen as strategic, mindful that they also need to be seen as securing operational effectiveness. "What it does is generate a conversation and a challenge around each role where the rationale for that role is examined and considered. However, we don't blindly follow the DMA rules. Some roles would not be seen as DMA-compliant but each has been examined and its purpose is clearly understood."

The process is also influencing management development and succession planning, sometimes identifying individuals who are operating at a level above their role and can be marked out for career progression.

Hillingdon has found DMA to be a very useful tool for organisational development and challenge, and it has been broadly welcomed across the council. There is commitment to it at senior management level, where directors have understood the approach, even if they do not always agree with the findings. Councillors have been kept informed but have not been actively involved in the process.

While any structural review creates a level of anxiety, the interview process used in DMA has been welcomed by staff as a way of being involved in change. "The process of having those conversations at all levels was really energising for the interviewees," says Mike Talbot. "Everyone was happy to be interviewed and very forthcoming; in fact a lot of extra information came out of the process that it is good to be aware of as an organisation."