



THE BUSINESS IMPACT OF FACILITATING CPS SKILLBASE DEVELOPMENT IN A CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT

By Allan Brooks

This article tells the story of my role as a Training Manager facilitating the skillbase development of a highly skilled core team of CPS practitioners. These practitioners were teaching CPS to employees and also using the process to address real business issues in Bull's Information Systems business in the UK & Ireland. We did this because having trained professionals available who can use CPS methods to address and solve critical business problems is very important to a rapidly changing global IT business.

The purpose of this article is to:

- Tell the story of how a corporate Human Resource Development function played a pivotal role in the skillbase development of a number of CPS facilitators by engaging them in a vision designed to achieve independent accreditation to teach CPS.
- Show how incredibly powerful the CPS process can be when it is facilitated by highly skilled practitioners in a commercial business environment.
- Share key leadership practices that you can emulate to enable your current and potential CPS practitioners to bring real value to your business.

Over a period of 5 years the Bull UK & Ireland business had made considerable material and financial investments in CPS training. In January '97, I invited the Creative Problem Solving Group - Buffalo (CPS-B) to conduct an in-depth impact study to determine what the return on our investment actually was. The study, conducted by Scott Isaksen and Brad Lewandowski, found considerable evidence indicating that the investment made in teaching and using the CPS methodology in the business had been repaid many times over.

Here are two examples taken from the Executive Summary of the Impact study prepared by Scott and Brad:

"In Customer Services, the CPS method and tools were responsible for meeting and exceeding revenue goals of £25 million despite decreasing revenue from traditional sources. In '93, the traditional business accounted for 85% of revenue, in '96, it was only 50%. CPS provided the ways to earn approximately £31.6 million over the four years '93-'96."

"Within Bull's INTEGRIS division, CPS was responsible for creating a new business unit (Millennium) which yielded about £10 million in new revenues in '96

and about £20 million in '97. This new business initiative was accepted by Groupe Bull for World Wide application. Millennium was only one of many ideas generated to improve the sales pipeline which is now stronger in all sectors. Improving the sales pipeline was the original target of the CPS session."

I was a participant in the first course offered to Bull UK and moved to an HR position responsible for all core causes for upper-level management. That meant I had responsibility for both the Foundations and Facilitation courses.

Prior to my involvement with CPS training, there had been no published strategy or Vision about where we were going with CPS and what the end objectives were. Leading up to the first CPS training session under my sponsorship, I began to formulate a number of ideas. These ideas began to crystallize in conversations with 3 people in the company who had expressed interest to be more involved in CPS and CPS training. After kicking off the CPS Training course, led by Scott Isaksen & Brian Dorval, I went home with a vision for CPS skillbase development forming in my mind. When I returned to help with the close down and celebration of achievements, I had a draft Vision to discuss with Scott, Brian and the newly formed CPS Core Team.

Our Vision

"To evolve Bull UK & Ireland's relationship with CPS-B over the next 18-24 months from 'training provider' to 'consultative business partner' by developing key individuals so that they are accredited to run foundation skills by year end '95; accredited to run facilitation skills training by year end '96; and accredited to certify table facilitator practicum."

As you can see, this Vision is very much about facilitating the skillbase development of CPS facilitators.

Who And Or What Was The CPS Core Team?

Originally, there were three people who, with me, had been on the first CPS Foundations and Facilitation skills courses run in the UK. They were: Paul Wright, John Rees and Andy Wilkins. Paul and Andy worked in Bull's Strategy and Planning Department and John was an HR manager. None of these people were strictly CPS facilitator / trainers and each had a principle responsibility other than teaching or facilitating CPS.

All three were extremely passionate about learning more about using the CPS process and teaching it to others. They could see the power of CPS when applied to real business issues. When I took the position of company training manager, they were already working with each other as process buddies or independently with clients in the organization. As a result of this, they were

establishing themselves as competent CPS practitioners adding value in the front lines of the business.

After about a year of working with a CPS core team of 4, we decided that it would be a good idea to bring 3 new team members into the core team. Our reasons for doing this included allowing others the opportunity to develop their skills in an accelerated way by participation in teaching CPS to others; allowing more flexibility in the delivery of CPS training; and having people available and up to speed with their development to replace somebody from the original team of three should one of them move on or otherwise become unavailable to teach CPS.

With 3 new team members: Emer Wynne, Steve Hirst and Paula Normanton, we were now the Magnificent 7! The Magnificent 7 was the first team of CPS trainers outside "The B" in Buffalo to achieve stand alone accreditation to teach CPS Foundations and CPS Facilitation skills courses. No other organization in the world has achieved this level of accreditation.

During the journey, the benefits to us were clearly considerable. As a result of our mutual push and pull with the team in Buffalo, we were instrumental in helping "The B" to gain valuable insights and process improvement to their accreditation processes.

Although we never got a perfect 5.0 in overall result from our students (that honor falls to Brian Dorval as the first CPS trainer to achieve this), we consistently achieved very high scores typically in the 4.6 to 4.8 range.

What Did I Do As The Sponsor To Support The Team's Development?

When Scott asked me to consider my role and what I did to contribute to the team's success, my initial thoughts were "... well not all that much really.....". But, with some help from Scott, I began to realize that the leadership I provided was a unique value added to the team. In the facilitation skills training of CPS we had used James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). I quickly realized that much of what I'd been doing to support the team was very closely related to specific leadership behaviors as identified in the five dimensions of Kouzes and Posner's LPI.

Here are a few examples of what I did against the five principle leadership behavior categories defined in the Leadership Practices Inventory:

Challenging the Process: LPI Item "Looking for ways to Innovate" The main innovation was to seek independent accreditation. Another was that I introduced a number of people from external organizations to participate in our courses. In so doing, I challenged the status quo of running CPS for internal people only.

LPI Item "Stays up to date" I maintained regular contact with CPS-B and actively promoted each core team member to establish and maintain their own relationships with the team at "The B." A direct result of this relationship was an invitation from Scott to Andy, John, Paul and I to participate in a conference in Florida for CPS practitioners in February '97.

Inspiring a Shared Vision: LPI Item "Describes the future we can create" An example here would be the Vision statement mentioned earlier. This Vision and our collective buy-in to it was the most powerful motivator underpinning our success with CPS.

LPI Item "Shares future Dream" We met as a core team on a fairly regular basis and, of course, during CPS training sessions. In our conversations, I often found myself talking about the wonderful things we were doing and where it was going to take us.

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Enabling Others to Act: LPI Item "Treats others with respect" When you read this for the first time it's easy to say "well, of course. I do this all the time." but in my experience it's not easy to do this all of the time with everybody. Our strength as a team came from the differences in each of us and this can only work from a full and utter trust in each other's capabilities and intentions.

LPI Item "Allows others to make decisions" When it came to knowing about CPS and how to use it, the core team became far more conversant with CPS tools, process and teaching it to others than I did. So I left all decisions about the content and delivery of teaching CPS on our training courses to Andy, Paul and John.

Modeling the Way: LPI Item "Sets clear goals and milestones" The Vision gave our goals and milestones and it was very powerful in focusing our energies. LPI Item "Practices what is espoused" Under the guidance of the team, I participated in every CPS training course at the beginning to launch the course and to set learning goals for the students. I also participated in the close of every course and the subsequent post course ALUo review.

Encouraging the Heart: LPI Item "Celebrates Milestones" I made sure that after every post course ALUo, we celebrated our overall course performance rating and the achievements of each member of the delivery team.

LPI Item "Tells others about the group's work" In my conversations with Scott, I made sure to keep "The B" up to date with developments and achievements. I also talked a lot to others inside and outside of the company about what we were doing.

In closing, we, as a team, have achieved our vision. I am very proud of what we have accomplished. My instinctive nature to focus on core skills development has clearly had a considerable impact. I'm mindful of an old proverb that goes something like...

"You can lead a team of horses to water, but you can't make them drink."

None of what we achieved would have been possible without the personal drive, energy, passion and commitment that John, Paul, Andy, Emer, Steve and Paula have for the CPS process. I feel very privileged and honored to have had the pleasure of working with them and my friends at CPS-B.

This was not about training. It was about how a training initiative coupled with organizational need and the work of professional CPS practitioners resulted in significant financial benefits for the organization. It's not often that organizational development of the nature and scope identified by the impact study comes from an HRD-sponsored program.