



ENHANCING COLLABORATIVE WORKING THROUGH GAMES



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Phil Challoner, the FtF Communications and Engagement Manager and colleagues, with the board game

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Facing The Future (FtF), is a programme of projects to transform the way Sandwell Borough Council's staff work collaboratively, to save money following £132m cuts to the budget over the last five years.

I visited the council recently to learn how they have developed a board game to harness collaborative thinking by staff to deliver the savings required.

Facing The Future has a £22 million savings target by the end of 2016/17 and plays a central role in the council's overall strategy described as '...to stave off bankruptcy, stay in business and continue serving our residents'.

Central to FtF is reaching out to every one of their 4,700 employees so they:

- know all about the programme;
- appreciate just how vital it is to all our futures; and (crucially)
- can chip in with their own ideas to contribute to it.

FtF 'champions' in each of the council's main departments are reaching out to colleagues with key updates – and in the process injecting fresh impetus to the programme.

Back to basics comms...

A 'back to basics' communication and engagement strategy lies at the heart of the council's comms approach.

The council has created a video for its website that explains to residents the impact of the budget cuts on the delivery of services.

However, the delivery of the budget reductions requires strong engagement of the staff within the organisation - and this is where the board game comes into play.

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The Facing The Future game lasts, on average, around 45–60 minutes and is frequently used as a lead-in to planning sessions, or as a team meeting tool.

But, how do you do that effectively across 4,700 staff?

Do board games work with staff?

The FtF game is a kind of municipal *Monopoly*, which the FtF ‘champions’ designed and developed themselves to gain and hold the focus of staff on the budget reduction project.

It uses the recognisable format of board games – complete with dice – to engage staff in thinking about the problems and challenges (and potential solutions), that local government faces (and will face with increasing severity) in times of austerity.

Phil Challoner, the FtF Communications and Engagement Manager at the council, says that there was some initial scepticism that a board game would be effective in helping staff collaborate around the budget challenges. Being asked to play games, when your job could be on the line, is not an easy mix.

Phil says that the scepticism was dispelled when players took part. What they found was that gaming helped them to articulate fresh, and frequently innovative, ideas that can be harnessed by the FtF team.

During the game, players get the opportunity to select questions about:

- transforming services
- saving money
- quick wins
- risk/reward

Using the questions, they are challenged to come up with responses that can win points for their team, in the spirit of collaborative working ‘ideas gathering’ and future success.



A number of ideas raised have led to the creation of employee led ‘Quality Circles’ and effective savings, efficiency and improvement gains.

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The innovative and fun nature of the game is successful with staff and other councils Sandwell have shared it with, as part of their partnership working.

The game board also features heavily in an FtF poster campaign across the council, to keep the focus of the 4,700 staff on the continuing requirement for Sandwell Council to save money and deliver quality resident services.

For more information on the FtF Game email Phil_Challoner@sandwell.gov.uk