

Embedding change at West Midlands Police



Explore how West Midlands Police is changing the behaviour of their officers in order to drive changes in the way the public interact with the force. Facing a number of issues, the force used a 30-day challenge to build confidence, share knowledge and establish new and lasting habits. Find out how real change was delivered by combining innovative thinking and creative technology.

The Challenge

West Midlands Police force is the second largest force in England, with over 10,000 officers covering an area of 348 square miles. They are responsible for protecting a

population of almost 2.8 million people and with a shrinking force dealing with increasing demand, the Force Contact department (which deals with all incoming demand) recognised that a real change needed to happen¹. In 2017 they soft-launched an online platform that allowed the public to report a number of crime types in order to reduce pressure from their 101 number that received over 2,000 emergency calls every day. The goal was to double the number of reports submitted online from 2% to 4%.

“Senior leaders of the local areas were well informed but I don’t think that the message got through to the frontline troops and that is where the 30-day challenge came into its own”

To ensure the success of this platform, the Force Contact department wanted to change the behaviour of the public by instilling new habits in the officers. However, there were two key issues that West Midlands police faced:

1. Front line officers were not aware of the online platform and thus when they were engaging with the public they would recommend the 101 number. This was in direct conflict with the central communications being released. Also, the public would get annoyed with the slow response when calling the 101 number.
2. There was a lack of digital confidence amongst officers, so those who knew about the programme would be not confident to show members of the public how to use it.

¹ West Midlands Police (2018). *Our Force*[website]. Available at: <https://www.west-midlands.police.uk/about-us/our-force>

The Learning Challenges

West Midlands Police were aware they needed to change their approach to learning if they were to encourage their officers to promote the online platform and increase their digital confidence.

Alice O'Neill, a Change Practitioner at West Midlands Police, was part of a small team leading the transformation. A number of options were considered, including e-learning and cascading messages down through the force via supervisors. The first was discounted because e-learning had not been well received in the past and the second relied too heavily on sergeants disseminating information and usually resulted in a loss of momentum. It was fundamental that the

“It’s about capturing insight and ensuring that the officer has kept the knowledge and reflected on what the experience meant to them”

“The officers were being put in a position that they hadn’t got any solutions or answers to the public’s concerns and frustrations”

programme worked as lasting habits needed to be created if the officers were to remain effective. The organisation required an innovative learning solution that would:

- Create a lasting change in behaviour
- Take a short period of time
- Be engaging and relevant to all officers

30 Day Challenge

- Is a way to adopt desired behaviours by practicing new ways of working
- A series of daily actions taking less than 10 minutes to complete over a short, focused timeframe on Cognician’s digital platform.²

The Solution

West Midland’s Police partnered up with Accenture and Cognician to create a 30-day challenge.² The learning process centred around 2000 officers and staff participating in short daily activities in an attempt to achieve 3 set objectives that were agreed across the organisation. These objectives were:

1. Raise awareness and increase use of digital channels

² Cognician is a digital coaching platform targeting the stresses brought about by the accelerating pace of change.

2. Increase digital confidence of officers
3. Build relationship, appreciation and awareness between neighbourhood officers and Force contact staff

Using a cycle of learning, applying and reflecting, in small integrated daily bursts, created an organisation wide impact as officers began changing their habits and behaviours. Understanding the struggles faced by the Force Contact Department combined with improving digital confidence, resulted in an effective learning strategy that re-shaped the behaviour of officers and subsequently the public.

An example of one daily activity:

Officers were given access to the testing environment on the West Midlands Police reporting website. They were challenged to experience the site as a member of the public and report a theft. They then had to reflect and consider how they found the experience.

All the insights gained from the officers' reflections were gathered online.

Shaping the Solution

To ensure that the programme was completely aligned to individual needs across the region, 8 workshops with approximately 60-70 participants, from a variety of backgrounds around the organisation, were used to establish the relevance of the challenges in relation to the established learning objectives. Working with officers and staff members to shape the solution ensured that they would be engaged and participate in the learning. The workshops provided insights into what daily activities would be needed to achieve the goals and how they needed to be framed to engage the audience.

The engagement of officers in the preliminary planning stages aided in transforming the digital presence of the organisation.



How did it Work in Practice?

Challenges framed in a series of micro-activities were released to the police force each day via Cognician's digital platform; here officers received, reflected on and completed daily challenges through mobile devices or desktop. The platform used gaming

elements and interactivity with other participants to create a sense of competition which ensured engagement was maintained.³

Repetitive Actions and Reflections

West Midlands Police were aware of the importance of repetition and reflection, so they ensured their staff understood why these steps featured in the 30-day challenge. Officers were encouraged to repeat activities with slight variation, for example the initial activity of getting the officer to submit a report in the test platform was followed up by asking them to get members of the public to engage with the online reporting website and then again by asking them to encourage a less digitally competent person to use the website. Encouraging structured and regular repetition in different contexts, West Midlands Police ensured that officers reflected on their experiences and learnt from them.

“Some tasks needed to be repetitive because what we didn’t want was just to do the 30-days and then everybody lapse back into old, bad behaviour”

Reflection was a large part of the learning process that was made possible through online technology. Through a shared platform, learners reflected on their experiences of the days challenge and could view and respond to other officers’ insights. Reflecting became an active process whereby managers encouraged, and spared time at the end of the shift, for their teams to reflect on their experiences in order to improve in the future.

Rollout

The timing of this project was critical as the challenge deliberately coincided with the high summer demand period. It was clear that this was the biggest opportunity for officers to make a real behavioural change and encourage the public to engage online. Whilst it became difficult for officers to find time for the challenges, due to a particularly high-profile event that took place, they retrospectively completed the activities. The desire to complete the activities showed a high level of engagement, which was a great sign of success for the 30-day challenge.



³ Kayton, B (2018). ‘Digital Capabilities to Accelerate Behaviour Change’[leaflet], prepared for *The Brandon Hall Human Capital Management Conference* in West Palm Beach, Florida

Technology and Using Data

Technology was central to the learning process at West Midland's Police service as it supported and encouraged application and reflection as two key steps to creating behaviour change. Technology was used by the learners as a shared platform publicized the challenges, motivated learners through competition and encouraged engagement.

Using it for short periods of time at the start and/or end of their shift, officers shared their experiences in a supportive online environment where they got to interact with

other colleagues. Here they had the opportunity to respond to other people's reflections and insights.

Technology did not just allow for support through the creation of a learner community but gave learners guidance in what they should reflect on through the

“Technology was essential...what we were able to do was check who was engaged”

use of games and targets. There was a clear structure to the learning that was made apparent as officers collected different badges for completing challenges on a daily basis.

Taking this further, using an online platform meant that completion data and insight from reflections could be collected, analysed and used to increase engagement with learning. The Force Contact Department tracked who was doing the challenges and targeted those who were not participating in the activities; in the process, uncovering what the challenge was lacking or why the individual was not completing the activities. Building on from feedback ensured the challenges reached as many officers as possible, which meant more learners were applying, reflecting and changing their behaviour.

Managers, Support and Encouragement

The encouragement and support provided by management was central to the success of the 30-day challenge. Through gamification and the creation of a competitive leader board, managers were themselves encouraged (through their own competitiveness) to spur on their team to participate in the learning challenges. This proved to be an undeniable success within this organisation. Managers enthusiastically participated in the learning process as they reminded officers in their daily meetings about the days challenge and where they were on the leader board.



The encouragement and support provided by management ensured officer engagement with the scheme, meaning that learning was more effectively applied in practice.

Involving staff from senior management level to frontline officers throughout the entire process resulted in an increase in the overall application of learning.

Impact

The new approach to learning created both an individual and organisational change as it increased the agility and flexibility of the West Midlands police; ensuring they could adapt to their challenges and transform to an increasingly digital organisation. What's more this lasting change was achieved within weeks.

Feedback from the Corporate Communications Department within West Midlands Police revealed that the 30-day challenge was more successful than any internal campaign that had been run previously. Learner engagement increased due to the nature of the "short, sharp challenges" which ensured motivation, interactivity, support and guidance along the journey of changing behaviour. Next to this, new learning processes began to surface in the organisation as there became increased awareness of how people are connecting through learning. The innovative 30-day challenge changed the way officers think about the way they work and learn together.

Insights collected internally not only showed that officers increased their confidence when speaking to the public, the challenge also strengthened links between Corporate

"The culture change and behaviour change is there. People are thinking digital before 101. That is their immediate default now."

Communications Department and the officers on the beat, highlighting areas of continual improvement.

Moreover, the number of incidents reported online has doubled and reached the 4% target, the public are spending more time on the website as they are valuing the advice given online and the digital capabilities

have increased which has helped increase the number of Twitter and Facebook followers of the West Midland's Police.

The creation of new habits, through application and reflection, was a success within the West Midlands police. This behavioural change had a substantial impact on how the organisation learns and how adaptable the force is in the face of continuous change;



creating and changing habits aided in overcoming their challenge around supply and demand.

Top Tips for Building New Habits

1. Engage your learners from the start. Let them aid in shaping their own learning programme so they actively become a part of the process and want to participate!
2. To successfully get people to apply learning, managers are important and should not be overlooked! They play a large role in influencing their teams' behaviours and supporting them to participate and use learning in practice.
3. Reflection is central to the creation of habits so ensure your learners are given time to think and process what they have been taught
4. Repeat the learning, applying and reflecting cycle because otherwise your learners could slip back in to 'bad' habits!
5. Learners need encouragement to ensure they stay motivated to reflect.
6. Technology is a tool that helps learners learn, apply their knowledge and reflect in a supportive environment. By blending learning and using online platforms, learners can reflect at a time easy and convenient to them!

About West Midlands Police

www.west-midlands.police.uk

West Midlands Police is the second largest police force in the country, covering an area of 348 square miles and serving a population of almost 2.8 million.

The region sits at the very heart of the country and covers the three major centres of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton. It also includes the busy and thriving districts of Sandwell, Walsall, Solihull and Dudley. Leisure, retail and conference amenities, together with Premiership and Championship football teams, attract millions of visitors annually.