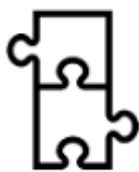


SITUATION

A major defence contractor had been struggling with improving collaborative and innovative within the workplace, combined with a desire to upgrade and improve the working environment as well as fit more people a smaller building footprint. Rather than bring in external consultants and have the solution imposed upon the organisation, it was felt that an internally driven initiative was the best way forward because it had the ability to be culturally sensitive, had input from the various departments (who were able to nominate candidates) and cost award at the same time. The output required was a business case with a series of costed standalone options from which the Executive Management could select and phase as they required.

TASK

As the Transformation Programme Manager, I was brought in to lead the initiative in conjunction with one of the engineering directors. The remit and output had been determined, as well as the timescale and all the resources that could be made available. The only variables that were open to discussion was the approach and scope, with no option off the table. I had a series of initial discussions with the engineering director, and we decided that this opportunity meant we could do things differently and the only limitation was our imagination.



The key aspects of the initiative were clearly defining, agreeing and varying the roles of the team members in the whole process, whilst maintaining open communications within the team to share the information necessary to either carry out of the task directly, ask for assistance, or put a task up for re-allocation if other priorities arose. I established a set of rules and guidance about the consensus approach we needed to take with regards to goals and methods of completing the tasks to each the desired project end-state. Another key aspect was identifying obstacles early and addressing problems cooperatively as they occurred. The final element was the recognition and respect for all contribution of all collaborators, place group goals above individual personal satisfaction and developing a team culture to help motivate and drive the team to excellence.

**ACTION**

The first action taken was to have a kick-off meeting to help introduce the team to each other, demonstrate the rules by actively listening to the concerns of each of the team members, brainstorm possible methods and approaches, talk and agree the definition, delegation and delivery of the tasks in an open discussion environment and elicit the views of reluctant team members. I wanted this initiative to be totally inclusive, and facilitate the maximum amount of new ideas and energy in the very short timescales that were available to us. I also wanted to develop the team members at the same time so they could take this learned and practiced experience back into the business and help drive other initiatives, whilst maintaining a sense of humour and fun wherever possible.



As there was no precedence for this initiative within the business, we had to set about joining the dots using our own initiatives, so there were no wrong answers, no such thing as a silly question, compromises would be needed to move the group forward when displaying a willingness to find solutions to problems, and a constant openness to new ideas about how to proceed. I decided that each meeting would be chaired by a different team member, and although the focus of the meeting was to be set in

advance, how they set the team to develop that outcomes was down to them, and I recommended that they make it unique and different each time to maintain the team interest, create a sense of expectation before the meeting and enhance the fun element during the meeting.



I wanted to maximise the collaborative conceptual level elements of awareness, motivation, self-synchronisation, participation, mediation, reciprocity, reflection and engagement, so set about establishing a tradition of having a game at the start of each workshop. The aim to was to engage the brain, start to get the group focused on the task to be undertaken, remove distractions that people could bring into the workshops and re-establish that rules that everyone is equal and there is not hierarchy. The games involved undertaking dexterity, visual challenges, or doing something totally different involving sound/music, taste or relaxation techniques. The games proved to be very inventive and people looked forward to participating, so much so that if they were not able to attend a workshop, they were very apologetic and always asked for feedback on what went on and what the next steps were.



A collaborative environment was created to store the outputs from each of the meetings, workshops and tasks, an A3 plan on a page showed what still needed to be done by whom and by when, and people were encouraged to post questions/answers, lessons learnt, improvements and recommendations between meetings and workshops. This kept the level of interest going and allowed people to find out exactly what was happening at any time, proving also to be a good leadership communication tool as well.

RESULT



The result was what one Executive stated as the 'best business case they had ever seen come out of the organisation', and this was supported by the fact that the team gained an Innovation Award and company wide recognition for their efforts.



The Executive Team lost not time in launching a number of the recommended options within the business case, ranging from a redesign of the corporate environment, more collaborative working spaces (replacing the individual traditional pig-pen desk structures), the creation of quiet areas and collaborative stand-up meeting areas with large whiteboards, installation of electronic collaborative software tools and hardware to improve/enhance the remote/distance working arrangements, more ad-hoc non-bookable meeting rooms (if they are free you can use them on a first come, first serve basis) and increased soft seating areas. The key to continued collaboration within the business is not just to focus on the hardware and installation processes, but to train, support and build the people skills to make it all work. You must have executive sponsorship, motivated change agents/ambassadors, and training events where the staff can attend to see what 'good looks like'.



Experience has shown me that collaboration is a voluntary purposeful relationship in which the parties involved choose to cooperate willingly (knowledge sharing) and with trust (openness) in order to achieve shared or overlapping objectives. There must be some type of leadership to help set the direction (focus), prescribing the methodologies/approaches (accountability) and approve the outputs (move towards outcomes). Not every initiative will create the desired results, and there will be a journey of discover to find out what works for your unique culture, teams and people, so you must be prepared to accept mistakes, forgive good tries and reward the right behaviours.

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