

BUILDING A TROJAN HORSE

BACKGROUND

As a result of a major strategic review a large, global financial services organisation had set out on a transformation path with the intention of creating a single business from a number of semi-autonomous operating units.

A new brand was created along with a new vision and values. Ambitious growth targets were established and now possible on the back of the efficiency. The scale of the transformation and the speed at which improved results were needed was unprecedented for the majority of people involved.

The particular issue faced by one of the new operating divisions, consisting of 150 people, was that it needed a much stronger culture of risk taking and collaboration in order to generate the returns the strategy required. The employee engagement survey, taken 6 months after its creation, indicated a lack of belief that the organisation could succeed if it remained part of a much larger and more risk-averse business.

The intention was for this division to be something of a Trojan Horse, however within it people didn't believe in the vision, were disenfranchised and felt they lacked the freedom they needed to be successful. As one member of the leadership team said "...we are fighting with one arm tied behind our backs".

One way of looking at the situation was that they were being asked to create a Challenger culture - with its characteristics of risk taking, contention, collaboration, high energy and experimentation - whilst being housed within a much more establishment business. For this reason, Relume was invited to help to shift the current mindset.

APPROACH

After a short period dedicated to understanding more about the current culture through reviewing documents, attending meetings, holding small workshops and conducting interviews, a conference was proposed for the entire population within the division.

Conferences at that time were widely regarded as "a waste of time", "a distraction from our jobs", "all ra ra without any substance". We set out to help them to create something different this time with the intention of:

- Encouraging people to get to know each other much better. Many of the people were new to the organisation and had come from different businesses now incorporated into this one.
- Co-creating and more importantly experiencing the identity of the business for the future. Including the culture, mindsets, behaviours and 'feel' that was needed.

The conference was created in a way that contrasted with those from the past. This both surprised people and signaled that change was in the air. The approach set out to:

- Maximise opportunities for real, energetic conversation and minimise presentation
- Encourage people to express how they really felt rather than the way they were expected to feel
- Provide the opportunity to experiment and take risks in a safe environment
- Encourage people to extend themselves beyond their comfort zone and to learn from the experience

A key feature of the conference was that volunteers were recruited from within the division to help with the design and facilitation. They were subsequently trained and committed to working alongside Relume throughout the two days.

This approach encouraged a wider commitment to the conference and a sense of ownership from the very start. We believe that it is only through self-sufficiency that client organisations generate the energy and develop the capability to handle the myriad of possibilities that arise in any change journey.

RESULTS

Anecdotal evidence, both during the conference and back in the office, suggests that people had found it highly beneficial and energizing. This can often be misleading since it is only a sample of the group, so, to provide a comparison and enable the effectiveness of the conference to be measured more accurately a broader measurement, in this case anonymous electronic voting, was used. We devised a series of questions and asked them at the very beginning of the conference and at the very end.

The delegates were delighted with the progress made over only two days and felt very encouraged to see that:

- The number of people who felt they knew everyone in the division really well had more than doubled (to more than 80% of the delegates)
- The number of people who felt optimistic about the future of the division had more than doubled
- The number of people who felt uncertain about the future of the division had more than halved

and perhaps most importantly,

- the number of people who felt they had an important part to play in shaping the future of the division had risen from below 50% to above 80% of the delegates.

Given the size of the transformation being undertaken and the issues being faced, the factor likely to have the biggest impact on its success is whether the people involved in the transformation both believe in it and are committed to it. Through this intense but enjoyable conference the chances of successfully creating a Challenger culture have been bolstered considerably. In the words of the Managing Director of the division, "with the commitment and energy we have created here I am very confident that we can achieve what we need to".