



news

Change Management for Sector Skills Council

With the help of The Coverdale Organisation, ConstructionSkills is changing to respond to the challenges posed by its being the Sector Skills Council for the construction sector. ConstructionSkills is an employer-led, independent organisation, licensed by the Secretary of State for Education. It is one of 25 such Skills Councils nationwide that between them will eventually benefit approximately 85 percent of the national workforce.

Like all the Sector Skills Councils, ConstructionSkills has the task of bridging skills gaps and shortages in its sector and thereby increasing productivity and performance. At the same time, it is expected to be strategic in its thinking, leading the industry to a more robust future by listening closely to what the industry has to say and putting a compelling business case to Government. Sheila Hoile, until recently the Director of Skills Strategy, explains:

“As the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), we had been the industry provider of training at a national and regional level for over forty years and functioned well in that capacity as recognised in the regular quinquennial reviews undertaken by Government officials. With the Skills Council remit, our relationship with government

changed. Rather than simply providing nuts and bolts operational advice to our customers in the industry, we were now expected to take a strategic lead and influence policy. If we were to take a proactive role in the future of this industry and help to deliver the brave new world of construction, we needed to change, and fast.”

In order to fulfil its new remit, ConstructionSkills has had to rethink its strategy, behaviours, procedures and structures. To manage effectively its broader-ranging responsibilities, its Executive recognised that it was not simply a matter of working harder.

Coverdale worked with the organisation at two levels, initially with the Executive helping it to be clear about its overall vision, and then

later primarily with the Skills Directorate, which was at the hub of the 1,400 person organisation. Here the task was to help them build in sequence appropriate directorate structures, management structures, leadership and management skills and project tools/management techniques. It was, says Sheila Hoile, "a three-stage approach that brought my senior team on board first, then my management team, then the directorate workforce as a whole".

According to Coverdale senior consultant Mary Black, "In order to deliver the training and policy support that Government was demanding within very tight deadlines, the existing Construction Industry Training Board had to undergo a dramatic process of change. Coverdale's task was to help the directorate articulate exactly what is expected and what is the most efficient way to deliver what is required.

"Coverdale believes that change management is a process of learning and discovery that, as independent consultants, we can facilitate. Once there was clarity of vision at executive level, the next stage was to align the directorate's aims with that vision and then build the management skills and behaviours that would deliver change."

Over a period of twenty months Coverdale worked closely with the Skills Strategy

Directorate, using diagnostics to ascertain skills gaps and then management interventions to fill them. According to Guy Hazelhurst, acting Director of Skills Strategy, the success of the programme has been largely because "Coverdale has the ability quickly to grasp the bigger picture, combined with an intimate style in which a small team of dedicated management consultants could move to specific and often difficult issues and resolve them through skilled facilitation, backed by appropriate models, tools and techniques."

Something of this success is reflected in an annual MORI survey that ConstructionSkills uses to measure employee satisfaction. The first MORI survey after the consultancy's intervention indicated a dramatic improvement in staff morale within the Skills Strategy Directorate, with 83 percent of staff indicating that they understood the need for change; 93 percent said they understood their team's objectives, and 86 percent declared their commitment to the overall objectives of the organisation.

"There has been a lot of hard work since the change to achieve these results and our work with Coverdale has been an important contributory factor," concludes Guy Hazelhurst.