



CASE STUDY

Company: Sandvik Coromant UK

Sector: Engineering

Promoting team cohesion during change with action learning

CHALLENGE

To improve the performance of Business Development Managers and their relationship with regional distributors

Sandvik Coromant had gone through a period of significant change, streamlining its distribution channels in the UK. The role of their Business Development Managers (BDM) was to augment their relationship with the remaining distributors to improve sales performance.

Whilst each BDM was working independently in locations across the UK and Ireland, the challenge was to bring them together to share experiences, support one another and work more effectively together as a team. As the set work went on, they increasingly opted to meet face to face; a demonstration of the growing value they experienced on the programme.

METHODOLOGY

We set up an action learning set comprising the four BDMs and an internal sales manager required to work closely with the BDMs on the same reporting level.

We ran a series of five action learning workshops to build a virtual team with the capability to deliver on assignments which would impact the whole business. During the programme, each BDM had responsibility for driving their own project. As each project was a nationwide initiative, it involved collaborating with the rest of the team, and presented the perfect opportunity to learn from one another and form a strong peer support network.

At the outset, the purpose and objectives of the action learning programme were presented to the participants, and their line managers, to ensure support and understanding of the initiative. We asked the participants to identify what qualities they felt would produce 'the best team':

- Regularly communicate
- Listen to each other
- Have agreed goals
- Learn from each other's experience
- Improve their performance

- Team morale boosts wins
- Generate momentum
- Look at effectiveness and efficiency
- Question what they do

The sets lasted two consecutive days each time and every participant had the opportunity to present a challenge at each meeting. They left the meetings with a considerable list of actions to carry out, which they were required to report back on at their next action learning meeting. They also had to make progress on their projects between the set meetings, requiring them to collaborate and work closely with the rest of the team to deliver their work. In so doing, real team working started to happen.

Success criteria

- Behaviours which demonstrate the BDMs were working as a team, supporting, challenging and learning from each other.
- To witness an improvement in team collaboration and its effect on the delivery of each project
- To integrate the internal sales team (Head Office based) with the BDMs.
- To improve team cohesion and understanding and to maximise knowledge and synergy
- The increased ability of set participants to become reflective learners: "the peeling of the onion" in Reg Revan's words



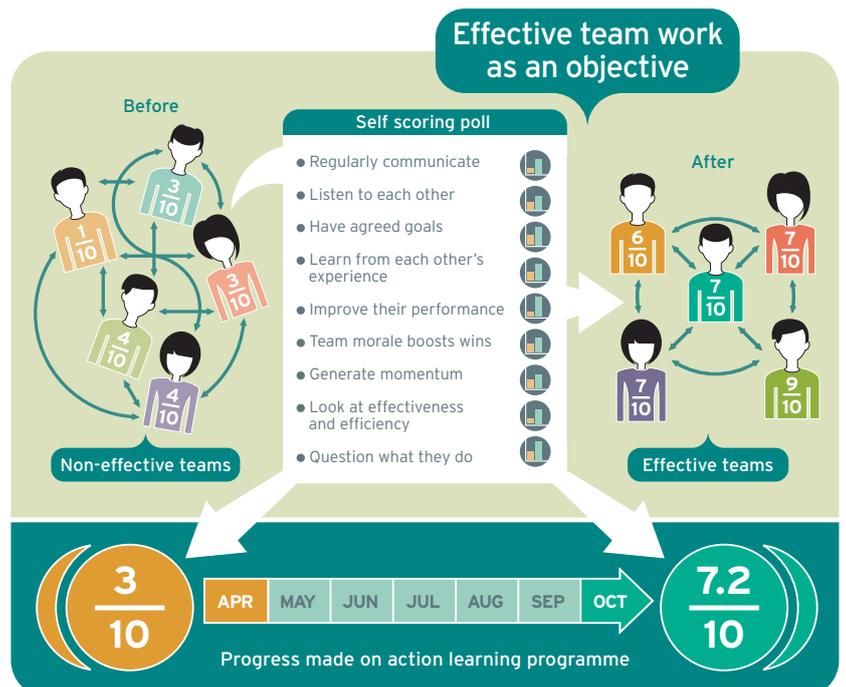
- The commitment and buy-in to the tangible project work outputs e.g. the extent to which the BDMs and Sandvik connect despite being in disparate locations

RESULTS

This exercise had a profound effect on the way that the team worked together. They developed a new level of personal learning, were able to reach out beyond their comfort zone in a trusting environment, and analyse information in different ways. The whole project provided a rich shared learning experience.

Attendance was 100% throughout and commitment to the work grew.

The BDMs reported running all their internal meetings much more effectively because they now listen to each person and speak one at a time.

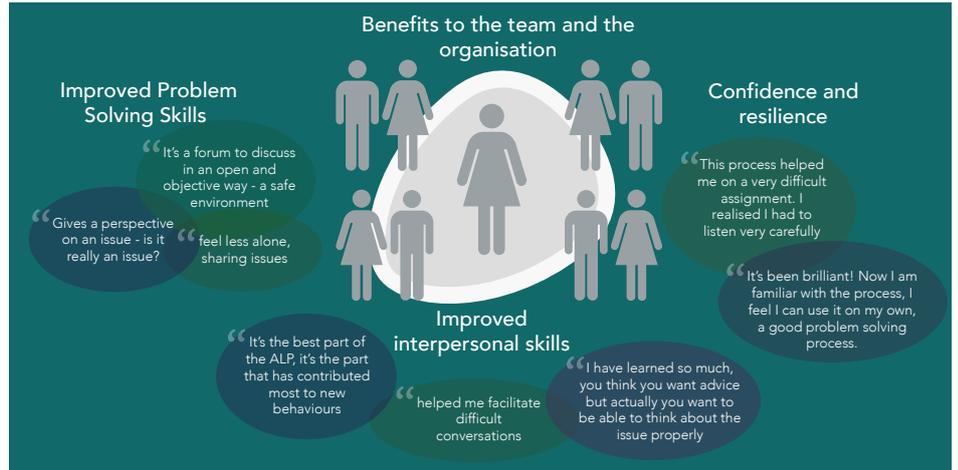


OBJECTIVES VS OUTCOMES

Through an exercise of self evaluation, where individual team members scored their team against the attributes of what they considered to be 'the best team', where 10 was best and 0 was worst, it was possible to track progress by analysing results of this poll at the outset and at the end of the programme.

The shift in self evaluation scores of 3 out of 10 to 7.2 out of 10 demonstrated real progress on achieving the desired objectives of the programme.

In conclusion, this action learning initiative produced a more agile team. Working collaboratively and with



improved interpersonal skills they were able to meet the challenges presented by their specific projects more effectively. The team recognised and appreciated each other's strengths and weaknesses, supported one another and flourished through shared learning.

ACTION LEARNING ASSOCIATES

Which of our strengths did we draw upon for this programme?

- The action learning facilitator firstly had to establish a shift in culture so that participants allowed one person to speak at a time. They were encouraged to really listen to each other and discouraged to offer advice, whilst maintaining the buy-in of the group to the process.
- We recognised that giving and receiving feedback were difficult areas for the

participants so we were able to introduce separate exercises to practise this outside of the presentation space.

- The facilitator remained focused on arriving at clear actions for the group and engaged in continuous encouragement to keep the participants engaged in developing their learning.

“ It has united a professional team and encouraged them to work together to share group objectives



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