

Sue Weekes finds out how two organisations managed their change programmes

How to make change happen

Colt Telecommunications

Peter Walmsley, HR director for strategy and business transformation at Colt Telecommunications, was in no doubt from the outset that HR needed to be a key player when it came to driving change at the company.

Colt is a major provider of business communication services, operating high bandwidth local networks in 32 European cities across 14 countries. The turbulence in the telecoms market from 2002 onwards meant the company had to become more efficient and achieve a greater consistency of service to its pan-European customers. It had to harmonise management practices across its European operations, shift from an individual country to a functional structure, and create a single culture across the group.

"We had to drive operating efficiencies through restructuring the business, reducing triplication [of processes] and focusing on economies of scale," says Walmsley.

"HR had to be a business partner in the whole process. The pace of change was so phenomenal, HR had to be there to offer guidance. And with the complexity of information, it had to help ensure the consistency of the message."

Measures included developing a single operating model and reducing headcount by more than 700 people in 12 months. Previous experience of change at the company, which employs 4,200 staff, had

affected morale and loyalty, and caused it to lose quality people. While it had sporadic examples of successful implementation, there was no structure to the change and no clear leader or manager of it. Colt turned to Kaisen Consulting to help it develop the right leadership at local level and foster a more engaging and consultative communication process between employees and management.

Elements of the approach included setting up a steering group and team of sponsors made up of senior management and Walmsley himself, carrying out a 'climate review' of employee opinion, holding regular briefing sessions for all employees, establishing workstreams to implement areas of change and identifying change agents within the

company. To facilitate the latter, Kaisen ran a series of workshops which focused on leading and managing change.

"We wanted to adopt a more inclusive approach and learn the lessons of past failings," says Walmsley. "We set out a far more structured model than before to enable us to identify change agents within the business that could help translate this change in line with the bigger picture. So we used Kaisen to help design and run change agent workshops."

Kaisen Consulting was set up in 1991 and claims to be a leader in the field of business psychology. Kaisen director Roger Coveney explains change as a three-legged stool, comprising change design, where you decide on the change that is required; change delivery, which is how you implement it, which largely comes down to logistics and can often be IT-led; and change psychology, which is often the most overlooked area. "You have got to make sure you are in the right place psychologically for the change," says Coveney. "Some companies fail to do this and rush into implementation. It's the role of HR to

take the lead in such matters."

Colt and Kaisen staged a number of workshops, mainly across France, Germany and the

UK, which were aimed at systems operation change agents, sales operation and systems operations staff and senior management. HR had a presence at all of them (there are 75 HR staff across the organisation). Each workshop included a case study which allowed participants to practise using tools for managing target groups through the change process.

The workshops helped people to become emotionally engaged and understand the psychological impact of the change.

LEARNING POINTS FOR HR

- Ensure staff feel involved
- Ensure consistency of message
- Learn lessons from the past
- Establish the right structure to enable change
- Regularly review employee feedback

Walmsley and his team carried out a review every six months to find out how staff felt about the change.

"We were pleased with the extent to which people felt involved," says Walmsley. "They had a much greater sense of how the strategy impacted on them."

The programme has evolved over the six to eight months it has been running and has entered its next phase with the arrival of a new chief executive, who is redefining the operating model. Walmsley expects the company to be in a state of change for the next 12 to 24 months, and says that HR will remain at the forefront.

"We now have a model for HR staff as business partners," he says. "HR has a place at the top table and it will continue to help transform the business."

WEBLINKS

HR needs to take supporting role in change management

www.personneltoday.com/30536.article

Getting a grip on change management

www.personneltoday.com/30134.article

'Friendly data' key to successful change projects

www.personneltoday.com/30030.article

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