

Organisation Success – Leadership Development and Management Development

Management Development by Creating Innovation in the Construction Industry

The owner and Chief Executive Officer of George and Harding Group of Construction Companies commissioned a Revans Action Learning programme for five of his middle level managers. The managers were from different branch locations. He hoped they would develop their abilities as a team of managers who may one day be responsible for leading and managing the company. He issued a directive to them to meet together for one year as an action learning set (group) to develop innovative ideas that would give George and Harding an 18-month competitive lead in the industry.

This management development programme was supported and researched by individuals from the Revans Centre as the programme was being implemented and for one year afterwards. Huge amounts of research material and data were collected to determine if development and change had occurred. Observation, recording, report generation, interviewing, case study and content analysis were used to form conclusions.

It was concluded that the managers brought a significant change to the organisation by designing and implementing the first ever staff development programme. This was one example of how they responded to the challenge of creating innovation. This programme resulted from the managers meeting together, identifying the need for staff development, and learning and working together to design and implement a Continuous Staff Development Programme (CSD) using an action learning design format. Their actions were motivated by realising that

A lot of the site managers were extremely unhappy. It did lead to two, three, four, five leaving. There were a lot of complaints. They weren't getting much support from head office that they required, and a lot of them felt very isolated' (Manager interview).

After implementation of the CSD, research revealed the following findings from interviewing the individual managers who participated in the Revans action learning programme.

We've seen ideas that have been put forward in these training days [CSD programme] actually turned into reality out in the workplace. (Manager interview)

...the first benefit that our action learning group saw of action learning was the four hours a month of strategic planning for the company and that's what we do. We get in there – we don't talk about people wearing bloody goggles and masks on site like we did for probably two months at the beginning. We deal with strategic issues. We're planning the company's future. Without action learning, that wouldn't have come about. We wouldn't have done that. (Manager interview)

I know for a fact – that we lost one person prior to CSD because he said, 'I've got to leave, I don't feel part of the main group anymore...this guy, had actually made the comment as well that there was somebody else who was close to going, and since the onset of CSD, has not gone and

will not go. So that's quite dramatic really. That's a result, a tangible result of CSD. It's not measured in pounds [British sterling] – but it is – because the guy that did leave, he'd been with us, I don't know for however many years, and we've trained him, sent him on courses, paid him 25 grand a year or whatever for 10 years. He's cost us a lot of money, and to bring him up to that stage, and to lose him like that – we've lost him. But the guy we were about to lose is now staying, and he's going to stay so we've improved that situation in regards to him. (Manager interview)

I saw action learning as a vehicle. It came very much at the right time. I had a lot of ideas, almost pent-up ideas, and no real true outlet to get some of those ideas into fruition. ...the CSD programme is massively important to me because there was a vehicle missing. There were several vehicles missing. One was just to be able to get the ideas out, and then how to deliver them to the rest of the company, and being able to influence the company and influence change. I'm involved in all of that as well. So those were all very important...and now we're delivering the change... a lot of it was there, in my head. So it's [the CSD] almost like something coming to fruition. We used the things that we learnt from action learning, and from the experience of that, and used that in the course [the CSD design]. We actually felt what we had done was good [in the original Revans action learning programme] and could be transferred to the rest of the company. (Manager interview)

I would like to think it's [CSD] improved morale, from the bottom up; it's improved training immensely, it's moving toward improvements in our systems, and it's probably frightened senior management. And it's probably had a positive affect on motivation.

*It's [action learning] changed quite a lot [in our company] because initially I think we were floundering a bit. It [action learning] was all new ground for us. We didn't know where we were going at the time. We didn't know what we were going to try and achieve because it's [action learning] never been done before in our industry in that respect. But now as time's gone on, and we've set this CSD up, you can stand back and you can see all that talk [in our original action learning meetings], and all that – what would appear to be just hot air – **has actually turned into something real**. So as far as I'm concerned, action learning is definitely, definitely the way forward if you want to improve, and make yourself more efficient, and the only way to do that is my learning from previous experience. (Manager interview)*

The above interview material represents only a very, very small portion of examples of improvements resulting from the Revans action learning programme for the George and Harding Group of Construction Companies. There was much evidence regarding the personal and professional development of the participating managers as well. One manager reported during his interview that:

I think it [action learning] just changes the way you think. It's the way you go about getting the things you want to have done. You develop negotiation skills; you learn to be in control; you feel more confident. I think that's the biggest thing. It makes you appreciate what the other people are wanting out of a situation. How can we have a win-win situation is more important.

-Donna Vick