



CASE STUDY //

Team Journey and Development for the Linde Group

Complete



Sue Graham Johnston, Head of RBU UK / Ireland / Africa on team development

Alongside some personal coaching, Sue Graham Johnston established a two-year Complete Coherence team journey programme with her senior leadership team at Linde. She admits that in the beginning, there was some concern about such a lengthy engagement: "We were making a significant time investment as a team in something that didn't have an obvious P&L linkage. Now that we are more than a year into the engagement, the team has come to really value that time together. In fact, we came to realise that it takes that much effort and work to fundamentally change patterns of behaviour and achieve a truly high performing team. Things won't be magically different with a single two-day off-site meeting. This is about genuine and long-lasting change.

"The first team journey workshop focus on contracting and was seminal in how my relationship with the team moved forward. The Complete Coherence facilitators created an environment that fostered an honest and truthful discussion about both our expectations. Emotions did run high, but the facilitators got us to a level of collective trust that had been missing to that point.

"The programme then moved on to look at how we could work more effectively as a team. Crucially, it provided us the vocabulary to be able to work better together and understand where people are coming from and why they might respond in the way they do

. This has made the team much more receptive to new members. In the last two years, we've integrated a number of new people from both inside and outside the company and they've established a level of trust and strength of relationship with their peers that would not have existed save for the work on the team journey. This deep focus on team behaviour is a new experience for those joining our leadership team as well. The investment ensures that new members can be effective in very short period of time.

"The team journey experience has also enabled me to be more strategic about what skills and approaches to bring in. We were extremely strong on execution, but quite individualistic in our general mode of thinking. Our team's work with Complete Coherence made me realise that we needed to enhance our team with others that had more collectivist approaches. In recruiting a new finance director, the Head of HR and I assessed candidates for that collectivist approach to ensure a better balance of perspectives on the team."

One particular skill taught and practiced on the team journey programme was a breathing exercise. This exercise enables people to achieve a more coherent state of being which in turn enables better control of emotions. Sue Graham Johnston expected some scepticism about this activity from her team: "I have a lot of engineers on my team and a breathing exercise could have been a colossal failure – I am from California after all.



However, everyone was willing to give it a try. It worked much better than I expected and people are finding real value in it.

During the team journey programme, one critical revelation for Sue Graham Johnston concerned decision making: "In a challenging session with our facilitator, I realised that our team had not been reaching agreement. When I had thought we had all agreed on a decision, the team was in a different place. It was a tough realisation, but at the end of the day we came out of it really aligned around our messaging and strategy. I don't think we ever would have got there but for what the facilitator brought. That experience showed me that, as a leader, I was taking silence as assent. I needed to do things differently to get over that. Part of the solution is me having patience with team members who take longer to process information and be ready to agree. We're now able to achieve genuine agreement. It's an area we're still working on, but we're making great progress.

"Another great outcome from the team journey has been the way we do our team check-ins. Our facilitator helped us find a very efficient way to do that team check-in. It's not only changed the time it takes – what took an hour, now takes 10 minutes – it's also changed the level of participation in the whole meeting. Because everyone gets invited in to the conversation in the first few minutes, everyone is given the momentum to talk. When we weren't doing that, a lot of people would sit silent. The new check-in has changed how the team interacts and it's a great chance to calibrate and get a good sense of where everyone is coming from."

Although the team journey is not yet complete, the Linde senior team is already seeing the benefits: "Everyone on the team has been able to move into the second person – consider other perspectives.

When I first came in two years ago, there were a lot of strong personalities who wanted to be heard. What we know now is that's not necessarily the best way to move the organization forward. Individuals on the team have put this perspective-taking into practice and have been able to navigate successfully some very difficult change. Seeing team members exhibit new leadership capacity has been incredibly rewarding for me personally, and beneficial to the organisation as well."

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