

Results



I. Situational Overview

Due to a change in Senior Management, one of the world's largest telecommunications companies (Telecom) had the opportunity to design and build a new culture and a set of operating principles. This resulted in greater productivity and customer satisfaction through increased employee involvement, enthusiasm and commitment. Business results had recently improved noticeably: market share had increased, customer satisfaction had improved, churn had dropped and customer growth continued. SportsMind conducted interviews with about 30 managers, and every manager interviewed attributed the radical change to the president's leadership in both providing direction and shifting the mood of the organization.

IN BRIEF

Client:
Large Telecommunications Company

Project:
Leadership Development/
Intact Leadership Team

Client Goal:
To successfully implement leadership development program that would produce sustainable results, effecting productivity, customer satisfaction and market growth.

Sports Mind Mandate:
To work with the Leadership Team to lay the foundation for ongoing leadership development and to introduce practices for high-performing teams.

Result:
As a result of SportsMind's work with Telecom, an aligned, high-performing team was formed in under a year. This Leadership Team was instrumental in shifting the focus and culture of the entire organization and ensuring its success. This led to a monumental increase in employee productivity and customer satisfaction.

With these successes as a foundation, the president saw an opportunity to build on this momentum to produce even greater business results and secure a greater competitive advantage, employee pride, industry recognition and customer satisfaction. Managers were very clear that they needed enhanced process and project management skills to be successful. They were also clear that while they were gathering momentum, they needed help to sustain the shift in mood and positive results for continued success.

Having acknowledged these changes, the president saw that more improvement was necessary for Telecom to continue its success. Specifically, he had declared that he wanted to generate in his team:

- the capacity to think more strategically
- a higher level of integration among the functional areas
- more consistent practices for planning and anticipation
- an improved ability to innovate – to produce ideas and turn them into effective action
- greater alignment with respect to the vision and values of the team
- better communication

II. SportsMind's Analysis

Over the course of 20 years, SportsMind has developed a powerful, precise set of practices that enables leaders, teams and businesses to be more successful and profitable. In the report that follows, we present some primary SportsMind operating principles for teams, and point out the specific challenges Telecom faced in meeting these standards and fulfilling their ambitions.

The first principle of high performance is that the team must have ownership of a shared vision, mission, strategy and operating plan so they can align their intentions, focus and actions.

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Clearly, elements of vision, mission and strategy were in place within Telecom. However, we observed a lack of coherence and congruence – even among those on the Leadership Team – and we suspected this shortfall permeated the organization. The lack of integrated clarity of vision and mission did not allow the managers to move or to pursue a strategy in a purposeful, powerful and effective way. While each person had a good understanding of his/her own accountabilities, we were not able to discern that people could consistently see their roles in accomplishing the overall strategy. It seemed that the Field Sales Organization had greater alignment than some other units. Evidence of this rested in the broad range of answers we received to the question, “What is the region's key competitive advantage?”

There was no practice for public accountability for unfulfilled promises or agreements. This missing practice produced waste, mistrust and lack of coordination; it did not create an atmosphere for generating new ideas or possibilities. Likewise, there was no systematic practice for expressing satisfaction for fulfilled agreements or expectations.

If a process were in place where satisfaction or dissatisfaction was expressed when agreements were fulfilled or not, the team would learn from what worked, generate a higher level of trust and flexibility, and improve its capacity to make new offers in future agreements and actions. People followed up with one another individually when they had a particular interest in a project moving ahead. However, we assessed that team practices for shared planning, mutual coordination and cross-functional cooperation were not strong, and that a solid project management process was not in place.

Finally, we saw the critical need and a clear opportunity to build a new, coherent organizational culture. This culture would provide concrete practices of cooperation and coordination that would mobilize teamwork within the Leadership Team and then throughout the organization.

Building and maintaining trust is essential to leadership development and the team's success.

We observed that the Telecom Leadership Team had a number of trust issues. SportsMind's methodology considers trust as an assessment someone makes of another's sincerity, competence (capability to fulfill commitments), and reliability (consistency in managing commitments). There was enormous trust between the team members and the president. Every person we talked with trusted the president's sincerity, competence and reliability as a person and as their leader; his attitude and actions had produced a degree of team commitment, engagement and trust that we had seldom seen in our work with other clients.

The level of trust among team members was a different story. Generally, team members held that other team members had integrity and could be trusted in their sincerity. However, we heard some reports of

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“hidden agendas” and of circumstances where outcomes were far different from original promises or stated commitments.

While there was a general appreciation of one another’s competencies, some people on the team questioned other members’ competence levels, particularly given the new business realities and demands that arose around “raising the bar.” We understood that standards were currently being developed for each management level; however, the reality was that a common set of standards or expectations either did not seem to exist or, if such common standards did exist, they were not uniformly understood or applied.

Even so, there did not seem to be an opening for having this conversation privately, let alone publicly. SportsMind’s experience in working with world-class leaders and teams shows that after declaring a mission, teams must define the necessary skills and competencies and be able to speak about those competencies in a public and safe way. Our biggest concern was that team members did not trust some other team members’ reliability. Several managers expressed their frustration that a number of action initiatives had been assigned or agreed to by team members, but the follow-up on those initiatives was allowed to drift. Specific commitments for next steps or deliverables had not been forthcoming. As a result, some people anticipated that others would not do what they were asked or that projects would go “into a black hole.” Without a sense of trust (which must be actively, recurrently and publicly created), the leadership team had less flexibility, a reduced confidence in the future, and a diminished interest in, or capacity for, innovation.

We know that developing trust is an essential management competence and that it can be produced with practice. A team cannot be successful without consciously

understanding trust and systematically developing the practices to grow and foster it. As the team members learned this among themselves, they would also begin increasing trust with their respective teams and throughout the organization. We also saw that the capacity to build trust in the marketplace (with customers, suppliers and distributors) is essential for continued business growth and success.

High-performing teams have a natural bias for action and for producing results when operating within a shared context (i.e. strategy and operating plan) toward a shared set of objectives.

Our interviews did not reveal a consistent set of clear priorities among team members or a methodical approach to setting priorities, generating possibilities, making assessments and moving to action in a systematic way. Further, we did not see a consistent approach for effectively anticipating and heading off the breakdowns that are characteristic of any set of business processes.

We attributed much of this confusion to an unclear understanding of what it takes to produce effective action. We see action as a shared commitment backed by coherent coordination to produce a future result, not action as movement or activity. Effective action is produced when people make effective requests, promises, offers, assessments and declarations. We saw little understanding about what it takes to make and manage commitments, or how to speak in a way that evokes agreement or commitment from someone else (particularly across functional groups or organizations). In producing effective action, the members of a team must have a shared interpretation of what their mutual expectations are and actually take time to design them – in advance of and throughout the execution of the process.

We recognized that it was essential to create an effective set of integrated systems and processes, while at the same time building specific leadership practices and competencies.

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For us, defining the key business processes for an enterprise is a way for the roles, expectations, commitments, standards of satisfaction and metrics to be mutually designed and shared. The basis of this design is the Action Cycle.

The Action Cycle is a generic blueprint for producing results and satisfaction. It is a simple, yet powerful way to both diagnose breakdowns in the coordination of action and design new actions between people, within teams and between organizations. We believe that by viewing business activity in terms of this simple cycle, people become more effective in working together to produce satisfaction by virtue of dramatically

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enhancing their capacity to coordinate action. We suggested that by seeing work as a series of connected

action cycles, we could bring a new perspective to organizational design and function. We showed how mapping day-to-day workflow in these terms could result in major improvements in quality and productivity, decreased project cycle time, and a major shift in the mood in which people work.

III. SportsMind's Recommendations / Course Design

We proposed working together in two areas necessary for substantive, long-lasting leadership development and organizational change. We recognized that it was essential to create an effective set of integrated systems and processes, while at the same time building specific leadership practices and competencies. Many programs focus on one or the other. We proposed a strong integration of the two. Track One consisted of a Process Improvement Project, designed to begin immediately to produce some instant changes while preparing the organization for Track Two. Track Two was a broader, longer-term leadership development program, designed to build the competencies and

practices for operating in a culture of accountability. The two tracks are summarized below.

Track One: Designed and Implemented Integrated Business Processes

The outcomes of this training were three-fold:

- Generated a shared understanding among the Leadership Team about the overall business, and developed concrete methods to improve organizational coordination
- Produced integrated business process maps that were used as operational and strategic blueprints for continued business improvement
- Quickly increased collaboration by working together on project teams that allowed introduction of the practices for building teams, managing projects and creating a culture of accountability

We conducted two 1-day training sessions covering:

- Business process design based on the Action Cycle
- Project and team management based on the practices of accountability

This gave us common background and guidelines from which to operate, but the real learning took place as we worked together. We divided the Leadership Team into 4 Process Improvement Project Teams (PIP Teams), each focusing on a different part of the business.

Our coaches worked each Process Improvement Team through the following 5 phases:

1. Defining and researching the key processes
2. Evaluating the effectiveness of current processes, standards and metrics
3. Designing and testing new processes
4. Implementing and adjusting the new processes, roles, standards and tools
5. Monitoring and establishing continuous improvement

* (Phases 2-5 were incorporated into the Leadership Conferences)

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The Leadership Team gained a new appreciation of what was missing for them and what was required to operate as a world-class team. Additionally, they entered into the management and leadership training in Track Two more open to learning and with a broader appreciation of the overall business. We introduced a number of concepts, terms and practices in the process improvement training that made the move into the leadership development phase somewhat easier and faster.

Track Two: Leadership Development

Track Two consisted of a 6-month program that engaged the team in new levels of learning, generated greater degrees of trust, and produced demonstrable competencies for leadership. The key elements of this program were:

- An Off-Site Core Training Session that opened a mood of learning and commitment
- Management Conferences – five 2-day meetings where new competencies were introduced and existing practices were honed and improved
- Project Teams – work-related teams that addressed key business issues
- Coaching – hands-on work that developed the competencies and practices

Management Conferences

The Management Conferences were where the process of competence-building took place. Each of the 2-day sessions was interactive and offered the whole team an opportunity to come together to review, learn new concepts, and work to build new management practices. These Management Conferences were scheduled to take place every 6-8 weeks, with the first two sessions scheduled closer together to generate initial momentum. We incorporated the process work into these conferences.

There was a series of program elements that were delivered in these sessions. We concluded each conference by giving the participants a structured written assignment that provided reading, exercises and practices that built on the concepts and skills introduced in that conference. The participants were grouped into their Project Teams and worked on the assignments in two scheduled meetings between conferences. The SportsMind coach attended and guided these Project Team meetings.

The meetings and conferences focused on:

- Identifying and managing Action Cycles
- Managing projects as a network of commitments
- Mobilizing and leading teams
- Building new practices for leadership development and taking performance to the “next level”
- Recognizing and managing moods (emotional competence)
- Building new practices for managing meetings
- Utilizing new practices for building and rebuilding trust
- Building a shared capacity to generate customer satisfaction and innovation

IV. Results

As a result of SportsMind’s work with Telecom, an aligned, high-performing team was formed in under a year. This Leadership Team was instrumental in shifting the focus and culture of the entire organization, thereby ensuring its success. This led to a monumental increase in employee productivity and customer satisfaction.

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For more than two decades, SportsMind's business focus has been on improving human performance and productivity in organizations. We specialize in leadership development and the creation of productive work teams.

Our services are based on three core learning competencies that build strong leadership capabilities, advanced communication skills and team-focused relationship management techniques:

Linguistic Competence focuses on communication – speaking and listening – among individuals. Authentic and clear commitment-based communication builds trust, improves collaboration, mobilizes and coordinates for action, and allows for high performance and accurate fulfillment of individual and team objectives.

Somatic Competence includes a practice of mind-body alignment so that individuals can effectively self-manage in times of change and stress. We believe that self-knowledge – the awareness of one's moods, talents and barriers to improvement – is the gateway to high performance and is essential in fostering trust and confidence in one's leadership decisions.

Emotional Competence leverages self-awareness – effective mood management, empathy and adeptness in relationships – to foster success regardless of external circumstances.

SportsMind practices, tools and methodologies focus on unlocking **the potential of the individual** as the means to achieving measurable, sustainable organizational results.

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