

NEW GAME-PLAN CASE STUDY

BUILDING NETWORKING CAPABILITY AND STRUCTURED NETWORKS

This case study summarises a programme of support for Networking for a global biosciences company. They recognised a critical need to improve knowledge-sharing within and between different functions, across all their global regions, and engaged us to establish Networking for this purpose.

Update: Following the implementation of this programme, our client engaged us to provide a similar programme focused on 'Science and Technology Foresight for Research and Development' (see Annex 1). Our client also engaged us to work on Stakeholder management and Networking within a global function (see Annex 2). Most of the new Structured Networks have since become self-sustaining, and others have been established in various parts of the company, on the same model. Networking by individuals is now widely promoted and supported.

BACKGROUND

We designed the programme to respond to five important **challenges**:

- Dealing with complexity in markets, technology and geography.
- Working with highly-specialised individuals spread across three global Regions.
- Establishing the culture of a 'single organisation' post-merger.
- Getting managers and technologists to work together more effectively.
- Improving productivity, innovation and technology transfer.

Key **success factors**, which we built into the design from the outset, included:

- Linking consultancy and training, so that participants were not only equipped with new tools and processes, but also learnt, through practice and coaching, how best to use them.
- Securing the personal commitment of senior managers, and their active participation in the Programme, with strong support from Human Resources functions.
- Articulating and communicating a compelling business case for Networking.
- Analysing existing Networks and the 'blockers' to successful Networking.
- Identifying the key Networks and Regions for knowledge transfer.
- Analysing the cultures associated with the legacy companies, which had recently merged.
- Aligning the Programme with other company initiatives, tools, and the corporate vocabulary.
- Finding and using examples of excellent Networkers from other professions and industries.
- Agreeing clear performance indicators with the client, both for individual Networking and for the operation of the Structured Networks, and communicating these.

We agreed two overall **objectives** for the Programme with the client:

- To encourage and support individual Networking by transferring Networking skills and tools to strengthen existing, informal Networks.
- To create four new Structured Networks, again supported by appropriate tools, as part of a strategy of transferring knowledge between global Regions.

The **scope** of the programme was:

- **International:** spanning all the company's global centres of excellence for technology in Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific Region.
- **Multidisciplinary:** including both managers and technologists, and covering the full range of disciplines, including engineers, chemists and project planners.
- **Multi-cultural:** embracing people from diverse backgrounds, including French-American, Brazilian, Chinese, Indian, German, Swiss and British.
- **Multi-tier:** including managers and technologists from different levels in the company.

INDIVIDUAL NETWORKING CAPABILITY

This part of the Programme had three elements:

- Pre-Workshop preparation.
- The Workshop itself.
- Post-Workshop coaching sessions.

Pre-Workshop Preparation

Participants completed several **pre-Workshop exercises**:

- Thinking about Networking and how it applies to their own business objectives.
- Identifying Networks with which they are associated.
- Specifying their desired learning outcomes.

Two-day Workshop

A dozen Workshops were held, each attended by between 12-15 participants. **Key elements of the Workshop design**, which contributed to their success, included:

- Holding Workshops at several sites in Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific Region.
- Including a member of the management team in each Workshop, setting the business context at the start and taking away any 'issues for management' at the end. This underlined the seriousness of the commitment to Networking.
- Encouraging participants to book themselves into a Workshop in another country, to create a fresh and stimulating mix of people, for collective benefit.
- Mixing sessions on business topics, inter-personal skills and tools for Networking.
- Capturing individual learning objectives at the start and tailoring the Workshop to cover them.

Each Workshop covered:

- The business case for Networking and for Structured Networks.
- Performance indicators for Networking.
- The differences between a 'Network', 'Project' and 'Team'.
- Examples of excellent Networks and Networkers (and their Networking 'secrets').
- How Networking can enhance traditional business processes and innovation.
- Practical hints and behaviours to 'slay the demons' that hinder successful Networking.
- Applying Tools (designed to fit with company processes) to build and strengthen Networks.
- Understanding and accounting for different working styles, values and cultures.
- Understanding and managing personal Networking styles.
- Developing a Personal game-plan for Networking.

Post-Workshop Coaching Sessions

Approximately six weeks later, each participant received **personal coaching** from New Game-Plan. We focused on topics best tackled one-to-one rather than in open forum, such as questions of behaviour or style, or challenges posed by specific Network relationships.

ESTABLISHING STRUCTURED NETWORKS

At the planning stage, the company identified a need to design and establish four **Structured Networks** covering technology themes critical to business success. The overall aims were to improve Networking within each theme, and to share and transfer knowledge between Regions.

Specific **objectives** for each technology theme included:

- Establishing strong professional relationships between individuals based on trust.
- Stimulating sharing of knowledge.
- Developing effective ways of working as a Network.
- Building understanding of relevant business drivers.
- Building understanding of knowledge and capabilities available from specific individuals spread across the company.
- Developing a shared Network Charter and Work Plan.

The two strands of the overall programme - improving Networking Capability and establishing Structured Networks - were strongly linked. For example, almost all those identified as members of the Structured Networks also participated in the Capability Training Workshops.

The **approach adopted** in establishing each Structured Network included:

- Carefully selecting business challenges which called for the development of Networking capabilities, both within the technology themes and between global Regions.
- Fully integrating and enhancing any existing, relevant Networks.
- Involving participants from across the company's Regions.
- Initiating each Network with a well-designed 'kick-start' meeting to introduce members to each other, and get them working together on specific tasks to benefit the Network.
- Organising the Workshops around other events, to minimise travelling.
- Further analysing and developing the contributions received, after each Workshop, and feeding the synthesised outputs back to the Network as a basis for further work, thereby ensuring that the Workshops created tangible programmes of continuing Network activity.

Several Workshop sessions demonstrated **how to use tools to generate immediate business value** from the Network. These helped participants not only to understand Networking, but also to benefit by creating new information to support current work.

The specific exercises varied depending on the theme, and existing inputs. Examples included:

- Identifying information or expertise which a member (or his team) possessed, and making a commitment to provide this to tackle specific challenges elsewhere ('Network Trading').
- Identifying business opportunities within the technology theme by enabling diverse experts to share and debate ideas (these discussions were often immensely productive).
- Exchanging good practices which could be used to tackle generic business challenges.
- Defining relationships between 'core' members and the wider Network ('Network mapping').
- Determining in what ways, and how, Networks could assist current projects.
- Assessing the technical capabilities needed at a range of global technology centres, and where and how these might best be sourced from within the Network ('Network Capability Mapping').

LEARNING POINTS

New Game-Plan has recently assessed the **impact** of this Programme. Key findings include:

- Today, most people involved are practising Networking and now regard it as a key component of their day job - not as an add-on.
- A common language has been successfully embedded, and the Tools designed to support the Structured Networks are becoming widely used.
- Technology transfer between Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific Region has been substantially improved.
- Annual reviews have been scheduled to determine future training needs in Networking.
- The company's Personal Development Programmes, Performance Reviews, and Target-setting processes all now recognise the importance of Networking capabilities, including contributions made to the Structured Networks.

This case study underlines the power and strategic value of the New Game-Plan Networking Programme in tackling challenges common to many businesses today.

FURTHER INFORMATION

New Game-Plan is a specialist company which catalyses strategic change for leading global companies, public bodies and cross-sector groups. Our approach is innovative and distinctive, fusing Knowledge, Facilitation Services, a Practical Toolkit, and Supporting Technology. Our expertise and experience is broad, across many sectors. We have particular strengths in research and innovation. For further information, contact Dr Ray Smith: Telephone: 01428 661517. E-mail: info@new-game-plan.co.uk. Web: www.new-game-plan.co.uk.

ANNEX 1: BUILDING STRUCTURED NETWORKS: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FORESIGHT FOR R&D

The programme provided by New Game-Plan focused on improving science and technology foresight. We designed, facilitated, analysed and reported five separate Workshops, each involving 10-20 participants. One of these used our Brain-Pool supporting technology to enable in-depth deliberation on key business opportunities.

Specific objectives included:

- Establishing effective networking by individual scientists.
- Embedding Networking practices and tools in the organisation and culture.
- Progressing specific foresight themes through a set of linked Structured Networks.

Distinctive features of this assignment included:

- Networking and Networks were positioned firmly in the context of science and innovation.
- We adapted our toolkit to support knowledge sharing and development of opportunities in areas of newly-emerging science.
- We enabled the client's senior scientists to operate as a Structured Network, thereby becoming more powerful than a mix of individual experts. This was a multi-disciplinary community of senior scientists, with participants from the clients IS and manufacturing functions as well as from R&D.
- The programme featured tools for developing effective external Networks with scientists outside the business.
- To support the specific Structured Networks we used tools that identified and developed exciting opportunities, taking them beyond the 'brainstorm' stage which foresight networks often find it difficult to move on from.
- The Workshop itself contributed to practical Networking by bringing-together scientists with common interests from across four continents, many who had not met before, helping to strengthen working relationships and build the trust which is needed for effective Networking.

ANNEX 2. TRANSFORMING A BUSINESS FUNCTION INTO A 'NETWORKED FUNCTION'

This programme was provided by New Game-Plan for a global function providing IS support in R&D, as part of an organisation redesign initiative. It enabled staff to use Networking to increase effectiveness, add value to individual roles, and improve the credibility of the function in the eyes of others. Two Workshops were held with different groups of staff from this large function to explore different areas.

Distinctive features of this assignment included:

- A significant element of practical team-building, embedded by getting participants to use specific tools to improve their personal and collective effectiveness in Networking.
- Using a Stakeholder Mapping Tool to identify key internal stakeholders, highlight understanding of their styles and requirements, and develop specific action plans to satisfy their needs.
- Going beyond just 'what' the function does to 'how' it would be done and making this part of the function's identity and brand. This included transferring and embedding practical tips for engaging stakeholders.
- Raising awareness of the different capabilities with the function and how best to promote these to internal stakeholders.
- Identifying specific Structured Networks within the function as a focus for improving productivity and become effective agents of change within the company as a whole.