

Background and Problem

The company operates from two locations in the British Isles, importing items for the construction industry at the luxury end of the market. The operation in the South East of England has half the number of staff as the other operation, but only managed to achieve one quarter of the turnover. Previous attempts to determine the cause of this anomaly had failed and whenever the MD looked at the SE operation, all the staff were busy working on client quotations.

Actions Taken

A member of TVBA started working with the company in January 2003 on a “Business Support Program” as pioneered by the Institute for Independent Business. This involves spending typically two days per month with the company on whatever issues the company faces. One of the early actions taken was a “Brown Paper Analysis”, which looks at the procedures in place within the organisation.

Copies of all the standard forms and documents were collected and stuck on to a large roll of brown paper (as used by shopkeepers in earlier times to wrap purchases). These forms were linked together to form a flow diagram showing how enquiries were processed through the company right up to post-sale customer care. The MD examined the result and agreed after a few minor changes that the analysis portrayed the process reasonably accurately. Next, the staff were invited to look at the document and were asked to go through it 3 times:

1. Firstly to agree that the document reflected reality.
2. Secondly to suggest improvements that could be made.
3. Finally to hear ideas previously listed by the advisor.

In the first run through, it rapidly became obvious that no one used the official procedures, which had proved inefficient and unworkable. Everyone had developed his or her own variations. The 2nd and 3rd runs resulted in a total of 28 constructive suggestions, which were used as a basis for a new set of procedures and processes that were grouped together so that they could be implemented in phases.

The Result

Over a period of time, the new procedures were put in place and where appropriate refined in the light of further staff suggestions. The staff were happy with the result, because the new procedures incorporated their own ideas on how things should be done.

The MD was also pleased since the turnover in the second half of the year rose to twice that achieved in the first half of the year!

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Background and Problem

The organisation is a successful day care nursery with over 80 children, from baby to pre-school age. The nursery is run by a husband and wife team supported by a manager overseeing 20+ staff.

Having been in business for over 5 years and reliant on word of mouth referrals for occupancy, the organisation was in need of a marketing strategy, a management team and a review of operational systems and processes.

Actions Taken

It was clear from the initial meeting in Sep 2003 that the organisation was operating in a fire-fighting mode and did not have enough hours in the day to deal with the continual requests from the staff.

The initial step was to “stop the action” for the husband and wife team, take them out of the environment and attempt to break this cycle by reviewing the multitude of “things to do” piles that existed. A plan was derived to address all the outstanding backlog of issues through prioritising, time lining, delegating and identifying the appropriate person responsible for each action to ensure successful completion.

This was then followed up on a weekly basis and a weekly plan was generated and monitored until this habit was established, allowing the management team to be responsive rather than reactive.

To generate future ongoing clients, the TVBA member alongside the management team developed a marketing outline to identify potential target areas and how to address them. The idea to establish a volunteer parent group to raise the nursery’s profile was also proposed and targeted for implementation in 2004.

In order to reduce the amount of paperwork generated, various processes were simplified, saving time and effort, e.g. room allocation: staff/children and milk monitoring for grant reclamation.

The Result

The husband and wife team are now generating their weekly plan themselves and have since cascaded this philosophy to their operations manager, who has subsequently found new motivation through the clarity of knowing her daily tasks.

Support is ongoing looking at individual projects within the nursery to improve performance and reduce any wasteful processes and procedures as well as weekly coaching sessions.

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Background and Problem

Located in Buckinghamshire, the MD of an industrial fastening company had experienced a sharp downturn in business at a time when his many business interests had diverted his attention to less, potentially, remunerative ventures.

The organisation was in need of a full review of activities with the aim of putting it back on a sound financial footing.

Actions Taken

An initial meeting identified all the activities were spreading the MDs time too thin so that the core business was suffering, as were the staff, from lack of leadership, clarity and financial management.

The initial step was to identify and prioritise all the various activities including the relationship that existed between the MD and his partner who was based in mainland Europe.

A number of key business objectives were agreed including margin expectation and turnover together with an understanding of the business trend and medium term staff requirements.

A regular review of progress was maintained to prioritise all actions and to help ensure aims were fully implemented.

Meetings with the European business were arranged to build bridges and clarify objectives, obligations and agreements between companies and the partners.

The Result

The outstanding agreements between the partners were clarified and honoured, enabling them to be more open with each other about the direction and potential for the combined business. This freed up time to focus on guiding the core UK business.

Individuals in the business were more productive as clarity was given to their roles. Resources were directed towards generating more business. The sharing of business premises with associated companies is also underway.

This approach has enabled the company to work its way back into the black and, with the MD leading his team, on to a profitable and sustainable growth curve.

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Background and Problem

The financial services / household goods retail business, operating out of over 100 high street stores, required weekly store management information to be available for Monday morning planning meetings.

The central IT system was only able to provide consolidated reporting on Monday afternoons, and therefore, in order to prepare for the meetings, operations management prepared their own version of the consolidated store management information using a cumbersome manual process. This involved the store managers transcribing figures from the in-store systems onto faxes or emails to their regional operations managers, who collated and keyed their regional data in an Excel spreadsheet, which was emailed to the national operations manager, who in turn collated these into a national spreadsheet.

This method was prone to error, resulting in various versions of the truth. It was also very time-consuming, diverting operations management time and effort away from the proactive analysis of the information to the mundane and routine grind of generating the information.

Actions Taken

A member of TVBA helped the company realise their goal of achieving a single, central source of consistent store operations management information, easily accessible by store operations management.

The TVBA member project-managed the strategy, selection and implementation of a business intelligence system, based on a multi-dimensional database (data warehouse), which was easy to use and access, using the existing IT infrastructure.

The project was achieved within time, quality and budget targets.

The Result

Operations managers were able to focus more on managing the business, as they no longer wasted time on creating information. The users have the ability to drill-down from high-level information to the underlying detailed data, comprising the information.

Added value was delivered with the addition of previously unreported dimensions resulting in significantly enhanced analysis.

The feedback from users was “fantastic”.

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Background and Problem

The company is in a specialist area of the Soft Furnishings Industry with a small factory that employed 10 people, servicing the hotel industry. Sept 11th and Foot and Mouth devastated the hotel industry in the area and nearly killed this business.

A member of the TVBA IIB team visited the client in November 2001, to find that the owner was at his wits-end. He had laid off two people and was himself working over 80 hours a week to try and survive.

Actions Taken

The TVBA member negotiated a breathing space with the bank and set about analysing the business requirements and writing a business plan. He also sorted out problems in administration and accounts and tightened up the credit control procedures. These actions provided clarity for the business owner and the TVBA advisor and reassured the bank that appropriate action was being taken. Initially, there were so many problems that the owner had not known where to start. These problems were tackled one by one by the TVBA advisor and eventually all of them were solved.

In the meantime the owner concentrated on sales, which gradually rose. Negotiations with both the Inland Revenue and the VAT Office (Customs and Excise) over problems with late paperwork were also undertaken by the TVBA advisor. Later, a salesman was taken on, which made a big difference to the company performance.

The Result

Turnover to June 2002 rose to £380,000, which represented break-even and in the following year it rose again to £500,000. Turnover in 2004 is on target for £600,000 and an ambitious but achievable goal of £1M has been set for 2006.

More importantly, the client survived the worst crisis to hit his industry in a generation and he is on his way to a more successful future. His two similarly placed competitors did not survive. The company is now moving into premises that the owner has purchased on an industrial mortgage, which the advisor helped to facilitate and there are plans to open a factory shop.

The TVBA advisor is now helping the company to plan what business he can attract if he purchases another specialist machine and the company is looking at something entirely new – a plan to sell its products to end users via e-marketing.

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Background and Problem

Located in the Thames Valley, the organisation is a fast growing IT consulting and software company with a unique equity partner based ownership philosophy.

They were faced with several challenges, such as achieving their planned growth in revenues and headcount in a very tough trading environment and developing the capabilities to allow them the focus on key projects, whilst in parallel devoting management time to a recent acquisition.

Actions Taken

A member of TVBA started working with the company in 2002 on a “Business Support Program” focused on ascertaining why the company was failing to attract new partners and then putting in place the appropriate strategies, processes and people to ramp up recruitment.

The review of why the existing recruitment process wasn't working found that there was an outdated strategy, a lack of processes to enable effective management, a lack of administration, no common database of CV's and that the basic 'opportunity' wasn't clear to prospective candidates. In addition the management team, following an acquisition, which took up a lot of their time, had lost focus on the recruitment side of the business and because of the technology recession it was very difficult to recruit new partners.

The recruitment process was redesigned, a new database developed, a database administrator hired, all the existing documentation was reviewed and then either improved or redeveloped. Tele-sales people were engaged, existing staff were motivated and a monthly status reporting system put in place to ensure everyone was kept abreast of progress. In addition, the TVBA member performed a 'hands-on' role involving telephone interview meetings with candidates. A regular review process was also implemented to monitor progress and look at further ways of improving the programme.

The Result

The number of new equity partners joining the company increased by over 200 percent.

The Chairman, management team and other partners were very pleased at the increase in partner numbers as they provided additional funding to continue the growth of the company.

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Background and Problem

A few months before the termination of registration of companies to the old quality standard of ISO9002:1994 the Administration Controller of this Engineering Consultancy company realised that no action had been taken to carry out regular internal audits and to upgrade the quality system to meet the ISO9001:2000 standard.

The company needed to carry out regular internal audits and to install a Quality Management System to the new ISO9001:2000 standard.

Actions Taken

In reviewing the Quality System in place it became apparent that the opaqueness of the system was a major inhibiting factor in the day-to-day application of the system.

The shortness of the timescale available required that immediate action be taken to update the Quality Manual to meet the latest standard.

A programme of internal audits was initiated as soon as the first draft of the revised Quality Manual became available. The implicit 'continual improvement' requirement of the latest standard was employed to bring the Quality Management System closer to a smoothly running process that would be of benefit to the company.

During the review of the various business processes, necessary to allow the production of the Quality Manual, it became apparent that minor changes to the company structure would bring major advantages in the running of the company.

The Result

In spite of the very short timescale, the external audit resulted in the company being upgraded from the old standard and being registered for ISO9001:2000.

The minor changes introduced gave all members of the company a greater involvement in how the company was run. It also gave the Managing Director objective management information and more time to think strategically and to follow his main interest i.e. engineering consultancy.

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Background and Problem

The client company were engaged in operations that included a number of high risk areas related to warehousing, delivery and on-site production operations. MD was concerned on two fronts:

1. That they had no written systems for health and safety and that they were therefore vulnerable to both HSE visits (known to be 'in the area') and 'claims' against them for any accidents and injuries to their employees.
2. That whilst he was keen to have a safe workplace, he had difficulty in both knowing where to start and how to involve his staff, and all this in spite of the fact that he had access to various health and safety information and publications from the HSE.

Actions Taken

After spending time visiting the client and listening to the issues and concerns expressed, a proposal was presented (and accepted) that would initially audit the operations, identify the key issues (rather than merely trying to find numerous major and minor non-conformances) and put together an action plan to enable the company to make the all important start, have 'tailor-made' systems suitable to their purposes, and be in a position to carry the health and safety banner forward themselves with only the minimum of external support.

Time was spent with the MD and key members of staff putting together a meaningful health and safety policy that contained the main arrangements that were to be put into place. Simultaneously, risk assessments were carried out in two major areas of the company, utilising the knowledge and expertise of relevant managers, supervisors and operators.

The assessments identified a number of issues and better still, a number of good ideas that staff had for bringing about improvements. However, in the case of one particularly hazardous operation, a more detailed analysis with the MD was carried out that revealed the operation to be barely profitable (if at all) and involved a 'key' member of staff. Improvements to the operation would be expensive and so not cost-effective. The result was that the operation was closed down, the work sub-contracted, the resultant space usefully re-assigned and the key member of staff now redeployed in areas that better utilised his skills.

Together with the MD, a safety committee was set up involving volunteers from key areas of the company. The health and safety policy was introduced to all present, comments invited and a final version produced and presented to all other staff.

The Result

The external involvement was gradually withdrawn as the company took up the reigns. An experienced warehouse manager, with good health and safety training, was employed and given the role of health and safety officer. A subsequent 'flying visit' by the HSE resulted in a clean bill of health with no concerns expressed.

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Background and Problem

A small metal finishing company had two major customers and had allowed themselves to get into the habit of accepting orders delivered to the backdoor, without any prior warning. At the same time the “customers” were quoting “we can get this done for X elsewhere, so can you do it for Y”. The Company were accepting this method of costing because of lack of time to work out “proper” costs.

They were also pressured on times by the customer i.e. “we need it by tomorrow”. These problems occurred through lack of Management Skills, the inability to say “no”, confidence of the senior partners and “fear” of losing their customers.

Action Taken

Meetings were arranged with customers to “sell” the concept of more warning = equals better scheduling = better quality = better delivery dates = equals more capacity. At the same time other customers were identified to alleviate the worry of “no work” and the senior partners were coached & developed in confidence to understand what their actions were doing to both themselves, their company and their workforce i.e. “lost leader” work, low profits for a lot of hard work, daily stress and lack of control over their workforce.

By getting warning from the customers on a weekly basis at first, then monthly of customers requirements the partners were able to schedule better, control quality, hit delivery dates and still take on more capacity through better working practices and better use of resources.

The Results

Better more accurate scheduling, better quality of work, better & more realistic pricing structure and less stressful working conditions. Other plus points included better dialogue with customers resulting in better customer care resulting in more orders. The confidence given to the partners has also resulted in more respect from both the customers and the workforce.

The end result is that the company profit margin and turnover have both increased by 200% this year with predictions of doubling again next year. More staff have been recruited and trained to cope with extra workload.

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Background and Problem

The organisation had been trading for 4 years. It originally was owned and run by two partners, however 9 months previously one partner was bought out to enable the other to develop and grow the business, this caused some financial difficulties. There were 6 employees and the Managing Director.

The initial presenting problem was to obtain funding for the company to grow. Up to then the partner had been using his own funds to support growth plans. He had a framework of a business plan but needed this to be in a more appropriate format and to include the very necessary financials required.

The second area of need was that the company had no employment contracts, no documented processes & procedures, or employee development plans. The MD wanted to have access to knowledge and expertise about how to develop and manage his team, conform to legal requirements and to achieve the maximum performance.

Actions Taken

The first step was to bring in a Financial Consultant who worked with the MD to create a solid Financially focused business plan to present to the Bank. The consultant researched the best options for finance and then supported the MD in his application to his own bank. This resulted in the necessary funding becoming available. The consultant remained as an advisor to support the MD on Financial decisions.

The next step was to create contracts of employment and an employee handbook for all the staff. The LBGA HR consultant created and then presented these to the staff and all signed. The HR consultant became the companies Virtual HR manager and supported them in the following areas:

- Presentation skills training for the Account Managers and Creative Team
- Coaching for the Managing Director
- Coaching for a member of staff coming back from sick leave
- Creation of an Employee Appraisal and Performance system for the Creative Team
- Supporting redundancy process to successful conclusion
- Support to create a performance related bonus scheme
- General advice and guidance on employee matters to the MD and to the employees

The Result

The processes and procedures put in place ensured that when issues or difficulties arose (such as the requirement for redundancy) the company was able to clearly put those processes into action to obtain a clean and satisfactory result on both sides. The employees appreciated the support that they were given with access to HR support not normally available in a small business. The MD was able to focus on business development with the backing and financial advice of the Financial Consultant.

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