



Atkins

Atkins is the UK's largest engineering consultancy, and the eighth largest multidisciplinary consultancy in the world. They have 200 permanent offices and 17,278 employees worldwide. Atkins' annual turnover is £1.3 Billion.

Atkins' Highways and Transportation division employs over 3,000 staff in the UK and contributes to approximately 20 per cent of the company's group turnover. Transport Solutions is one of Highways and Transportation's three business strands. They aim to resolve transport problems through the design and application of innovative technology and engineering solutions.

The Challenge

In 2006, Mike Hewson was promoted to Managing Director of Transport Solutions. The Executive Management Board that Mike inherited was comprised of successful individuals, all high-performing engineering professionals with a wealth of cumulative skills, expertise and knowledge. However, he felt the board could maximise their success by improving their ability to work together as a team.

Mike Hewson had worked within Transport Solutions as Operations Director before his promotion, and knew that the management structure was divided into silos. Each member took responsibility for his own strategies and activities but there was little crossover, support or collaboration between sections. And though the board met up once a month in a forum, outside that time they had little interaction. As Mike says *"it was clear we were strangers in many ways."*

This segmentation had a knock-on effect upon the business. While the team excelled at delivering results, they were less successful at taking ownership of a business plan that would support

future growth. Mike Hewson wanted the board to develop work in new markets. However, when the board discussed new work there was reluctance amongst members of the team to volunteer for projects.

Enabling Visions

Mike decided to bring in an external supplier to work on the team dynamics. He chose **Enabling Visions**, a performance development company that works with leaders and teams to maximise their success. One of **Enabling Visions'** specialism's is helping teams become more effective in meeting their shared goals through the use of team coaching, leadership coaching and psychological profiling.

Group Observation

At first, Mike and Trayton worked slowly and informally. Trayton attended monthly board meetings, observed behaviours within the group, and then gave feedback. This process of observation and feedback was supplemented by leadership coaching sessions for all members of the board.

Though this phase of the project entailed difficult conversations, it did achieve its intended outcome; opening up difficult truths and allowing the team to discuss their causes and consequences.

Team Coaching

The first formal event took place in Dartmoor, and was built around The Insights Discovery® system, a profiling technique which helps individuals understand their management style, preferences, and the impact they have on others. This was supplemented by team activities, which took the team outside their comfort zone and allowed them to assess their ability to work together. The event was emotional, with tough conversations, but by

the end the team held a common consensus that their method of operation had changed.

The team then took their new understanding back to the office. At first they experienced a honeymoon period when they were extremely polite and respectful towards each other. However, six-months after the Dartmoor event the team began to slip back into old behaviours so Mike Hewson arranged a follow-up session. Having already done most of the groundwork, the second event was more fun and less emotional, with a focus on practical team development techniques.

In the months that followed, a great deal changed within the Executive Management Board at Transport Solutions. Managers began to share their problems, and to offer help and support to colleagues. Once individuals knew they were going to get support, they also began to volunteer for new projects. Eventually, the Executive Management Board was able to delegate much of their work to the more junior levels, freeing them up to focus on business development and the future. These changes effectively allowed Atkins to deliver a year of progress within six months.

Communicating the Message

Now that the Executive Management Board were working together as a unified team, Mike Hewson decided that he wanted to arrange a conference to communicate a simple message to the tier below; that Transport Solutions was going to change behaviours throughout the organisation to enable all employees to work together and support each other.

Enabling Visions helped Mike to focus his thoughts around the event and then brought in extra support from a top events company to help with the smooth running of the day. In the end, the event ran for fifty managers. Unlike many other

conferences, which focused exclusively on defining negative problems, the Transport Solutions event examined positive ways the company could promote unity.

The attendees left the day buzzing, with many saying it was the best conference they had attended. Six months later there are echoes of the message throughout the organisation, with Mike Hewson even hearing repetition of his core message from individuals who did not attend the day.

Results

Aside from Transport Solutions successfully expanding into new geographical and business areas, another benefit of the team coaching has been watching individual members of the team succeed with the help of their colleagues. Three members of the team have now been promoted, with one moving into a newly created role - working in synergy across different business streams.

But perhaps the biggest sign of the success of the project has been that Mike Hewson feels that he no longer has to think about team dynamics. That aspect of his work is so successfully embedded that he has been able to stop using **Enabling Visions** as a critical friend, and to start concentrating on other strategic aspects of his role.



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