



Building capability

Alfred McAlpine's leadership development programme has far reaching effects

The name Alfred McAlpine has been synonymous with construction for over 70 years, having built 10% of the UK's motorways in that time and over 80,000 square metres of office space in the last year alone. However, an incredible two-thirds of their activities focus on the management and maintenance of facilities, and the renewal of infrastructure rather than new build.

This shift has led to fundamental changes in the way the company views talent, and in order to ensure they have the right people in the right places they've engaged in a comprehensive leadership programme delivered by HR consultancy Getfeedback. Previously, employees would have very little contact with customers – in major construction projects the ambition is to finish on time and budget and therefore be gone before the customer takes ownership. However, successful facilities management depends on engaging with the customer and the positive attitude of people on the ground.

In order to implement these changes, it was imperative that the company analyse their current culture, as Group HR Director Tor Farquhar explains: "We started off on this exercise by reviewing the company's values and defining what it was that made the business distinctive. We came up with five values that embodied what we were trying to create - passion, honesty, collaboration, winning and enjoyment. However, we also wanted to devise a set of leadership behaviours that were much more tangible, easy to understand and measurable, so we worked with Getfeedback to come up with 11 behaviours that tied into our values and that would allow us to take the business forward."

Programmes of this nature are relatively unusual in the industrial sector, and it was unsurprising that there was

some resistance from the lower ranks; Ali Gill, Director and Co-Founder at Getfeedback comments: "Alfred McAlpine is a very forward thinking organisation, and their Group Executive Committee is staffed by a dynamic and ambitious set of directors. They really recognised that there was an opportunity to differentiate themselves in the sector through creating much more of a service-lead culture. However, one of the biggest problems they faced in this project was the culture that existed at levels below the executive team – it was a fairly alpha male and forthright environment, and not particularly open to programmes like this."

Alfred McAlpine has a complex business model, in that they run projects from initiation, through construction to service management, so different types of leaders are required in each environment. One of the challenges was to get

recognition across the group that the different leadership styles required were actually driven through the fact that their customers at each point of a project are also quite different.

Four different leadership models were defined that could meet the needs of the business during this period of growth, which are now impacting on the wider talent management process. Farquhar explains: "We have a 360 degree feedback product that is implemented across the whole company that is based on the leadership behaviours we defined, and we also have an employee survey that ties back in to the 360 and the behaviours as well. We end up with a whole sample of measurements that allow us to look at how individual managers are perceived to be acting, and we are now taking this a stage further by using them to drive our talent management process. We can use this feedback to find individuals who can role-model these behaviours, and indeed find leaders of the future."

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