

Towards Level-8 – a team development programme creates the bedrock for future success!

Bergander recently completed a Management Development Programme for Econ Engineering Ltd. Econ, which employs nearly 200 people and is based in Ripon is the UK market leader in salt spreaders and gritters.

Econ's business is of course seasonal, but with good planning the company can roll-out 35 vehicles a month throughout the year. Some years ago Econ decided to develop its QCB vehicle– the Quick Change Body. It is a unique vehicle that can be used all year round and that can be quickly and easily converted from a gritter into a tipper (for example) - this has an obvious appeal to councils who, like any business, are under pressure to make their assets sweat!

However, with even the best will and the best planning there are still the inevitable pressure points and especially just before winter! It is therefore essential that shop-floor efficiencies and effective team working are part of every day work at Econ.

After a discussion on the key principles of level-8 the management team agreed to focus on their people. We agreed with Econ management that the right sort of managers could be instrumental in converting the company's vision into lower level goals and objectives. We also agreed that, with help, these same managers could help to design and implement processes that would bring about efficiency and customer service performance improvements.

The Bergander development programme began with an analysis of the existing situation. We walked the shop-floor and met all key operational staff. By walking the process we got a good idea of how different departments must interface with one another.

The Econ production facility comprises a design department, a planning section and the following sections on the shop-floor: steel cutting and bending, welding, felting, paint-shop, mechanical assembly, electrical fit out, test and finally despatch. The process is what we call 'push and pull' – that is jobs are pushed in onto the shop-floor in sequence but then as components become ready for assembly the jobs are pulled through to fit out and test.

It is imperative that managers see the bigger picture, can make informed judgements and then make decisions, sometimes under a considerable amount of pressure.

Our remit was to develop a group of 5 key managers. Each of them was supported in understanding the principles of a level-8 organisation – the importance of having goals, the right processes and the motivated team of people. Module 1 was focused on this important concept and each manager left with the task of putting together some area goals and some personal goals.

Two weeks later we met with each of the managers to conduct a one-to-one appraisal in which we examined their strengths and weaknesses in a very open and candid meeting. To do this we used a simple profiling tool. These meetings are a powerful means of building trust between Bergander and the programme participants. The output of the second module is an agreed list of objectives that have come from a combination of the two modules. Fulfilling these objectives will be beneficial both for the individual manager and the company – this is why they are so powerful and how we can ensure continued momentum.

In the weeks and months that followed we delivered a programme of management development modules that used generic themes but that were presented and discussed very much in the context of Econ.

These modules included:

1. communication for leadership
2. effective team working
3. process improvement
4. change management
5. performance management
6. waste elimination
7. problem solving
8. building ownership

The development programme was supported by frequent reviews of progress. This included going out onto the shop-floor and speaking to colleagues of the managers in the programme – we discretely wanted to know if they were seeing a difference! Naturally, we also spoke to their colleagues and the senior management as well.

Throughout the programme there is an emphasis on real tangible change and business results. At the start of every module we discuss examples of application of the tools and techniques that we have taught. The open style of the programme means the programme includes a combination of teaching, coaching and mentoring.

In each case, the managers who participated in our programme achieved performance improvements in their area. The manager responsible for final fit and test achieved improved 'right first times' and managed to get people using more of their own initiative which made him much more efficient. The production controller significantly increased the efficiency of the steel-cutting operation and through the development of his own action plans and some delegation improved workflow through the factory. Another manager developed plans for improved stock control and achieved savings for the business by improving purchasing processes. Another manager was able in time to fill a senior management role that had become vacant.

As you can see, one of the main benefits of a Bergander development programme is the speed with which training can be turned into practical actions and then into real performance improvements. Following our programme Econ were much closer to being a level-8 organisation.

Peter Thompson, Econ Production Manager, said : 'the Bergander programme gave us real impetus'.

If you would like to discuss a tailored management development programme for your business that will equip your managers with the skills to drive and achieve lasting performance improvements please call us today. These programmes are highly practical and we have a proven track record of delivering significant change using this approach.

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