

Institution of Civil Engineers

Situation

When The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) planned to undertake substantial change involving both strategic and operational focus, they contacted Chiumento to see whether an interim manager could help them. A decision had been made to integrate the ICE, which had charitable status, with its commercial arm Thomas Telford Ltd, into one office, to increase efficiency and effectiveness. This integration would involve changes to business processes and interaction between departments. In addition, there were a number of projects running in parallel such as web development and organisation design.

The interim programme was to identify the relevant change components in the ICE's strategy of integration. The scope included examining all existing and planned change activities and identifying duplication of effort or gaps in the approach. The project also required the design of a programme of change and the introduction of programme management controls and governance.

Chiumento interim manager Brian Davies was appointed to the programme and summarises his initial assessment of the situation, "I realised that this would be an extremely challenging assignment, especially after being advised of 'silo' mentalities' that existed within the business. My early experiences at ICE supported this impression and called on all my skills and negotiation expertise to move the programme forward. A serious skills gap in project management at the ICE and a lack of resource availability was soon identified by myself as a major issue."

Approach

This lack of skills within ICE, meant that Brian had to put in place a number of fundamentals such as documentation, guidelines, controls and governance, to take the programme forward on a solid foundation. In the initial stages he worked extremely closely with both the Directors and department heads to define the business strategy and to ensure that change activities contributed toward the business goals. Reporting directly to the Director General, Brian outlined his findings and recommendations all of which were accepted by the Board.

One of the advantages of an interim manager is that they can 'hit the ground running' and Brian did just this. He made an immediate impact by meeting with Directors, department heads and key individuals within the first week, to understand their expectations and the change initiatives within their departments. These meetings also gave him the opportunity to identify some 'internal politics' issues that would need addressing.

He established rapport and trust with key personnel by working with them as opposed to forcing changes through. He also provided advice, direction and in some instances hands-on help, giving them the opportunity for credit rather than pushing his own input forward.

Later stages of the project included working closely with people and undertaking 'negotiations' with senior managers and directors to take activities to the required level. He implemented regular 1:1s with the Director General who on occasions had to resolve 'blockages'.

In all this, Brian was able to call on his specialist skills, experience from past contracts, and programme management, office management, negotiation, communication and inter-personal skills.

The contract was extended by 3 months as the Director General was pleased with the high standard of Brian's work. The lack of internal resources meant that progress has been slower than anticipated, however specific tasks that were required to be completed or moved on by the time the extension ended, were complete.

Results

Brian comments, "I feel all the objectives have been met, however additional benefits to ICE will not be realised until a later date. Processes and governance procedures are now in place, as is a reporting process for the programme. Guidelines and document templates have been written and issued. I also worked with a number of staff, training and mentoring them. I had to be flexible in my approach as the resource issue and lack of project management skills meant I had to spread myself widely and address work issues at different levels."

Tom Foulkes, Director General comments, "Brian has made a major difference to the tempo and management of this complex project and has enabled us to ensure that progress will continue after his departure".

By choosing an interim, the ICE gained more than just a programme/project manager. The added value Brian brought included instilling a sense of responsibility outside some Directors' comfort zones, this resulted in them challenging decisions as opposed to simply 'going with the flow'. He also introduced the essential elements of a change environment, such as a Programme Board. He put together a reporting structure and format for each project and a library of key programme documentation and processes for managing projects.

In addition he left a number of important learning points behind, such as the importance of detailed planning, and the need for a business case to be discussed openly and fully before change can be undertaken.