

Building shared ownership in Vision

Context

Thales is one of the world's leading experts in the design and manufacture of software and integrated systems to provide intelligence and decision making capability to the aerospace, defence, transportation and security markets.

In the midst of continuous change to increase customer focus and efficiency, Thales's UK HR operation has changed its operating model and reduced headcount – acting as one of the lead functions pioneering change in the business. The HR Director sought support to help strengthen the HR vision, build teamwork throughout the function and develop her team's capacity to influence others in Thales.

Approach

First step was to create a six person project team from Thales and Couravel to develop some design principles and the outline of a process that would engage all 160 members of the HR team. Prior to our first meeting we conducted a series of brief telephone conversations to explore with different directors, managers and employees what they saw as important needs that the process needed to address.

Outcomes from the design meeting included banning PowerPoint at the HR Community meeting, designing lots of interactive sessions, bringing a stakeholder perspective into the room, signaling change from the start (e.g. no tables, no screens, Open Space), ensuring strong openings and closings, and using insights from Neuroscience to create a brain friendly design (e.g. short sessions, lots of breaks, fun, laughter and novelty using lots of energisers).

Using our conference design as one element of a larger discussion, we ran, prior to the main visioning meeting, a session for all the HR Directors over a day to help them agree functional priorities. This focused on their customers (senior leaders, high potentials, their teams, etc.) and helped the team outline critical themes that should drive action planning. We also invited the team to share personal commitments.

The main meeting was structured around "customers." We used a blank customer journey from candidate to leaver. Each image represented different customer/s and during the conference using giant posters we invited people to visualize the experience of each customer group and how HR supported this. The process was designed to encourage a highly commercial perspective for the HR team, effectively asking how HR supports commercial performance in the future?



Following this, Open Space discussions helped people shape an agenda that ranged across 12 different topics and were self-facilitated with participants moving to and between the conversations that most interested them.

The HR Vision at Thales:

Following a synthesis of all input we created a Big Picture representing the HR vision. We invited feedback on the emerging vision in the second day and then moved into team based action planning facilitated by the HR Directors and their colleagues.

Before finishing each member of the team made personal commitments on how they planned to support the vision.



The commitment wall at Thales

Results

It has been described as the “Epic HR Conference” and some feedback from all the participants makes the point:

The conference...	Disagree	Agree
...was a good use of my time	1	99
...has helped to build a shared HR vision	0	100
...has increased my understanding of HR’s plans for the future	6	94
...has helped build a stronger HR team	2	98
...has increased understanding of how different parts of HR support the business	15	85
...was well facilitated	1	99

What impressed us was the energy in the room during all the discussions and the volume and quality of input we got when asking participants how to use the vision internally within HR and with customers.

Turning vision creation over to the whole function was a risky venture yet in terms of ownership and support it has generated a huge payoff.

Lessons

Some of the important lessons for the process include:

- Gather opinions for the design team so that multiple perspectives, including of course the voice of different audience members, enrich the design work.
- Let participants design segments of the agenda and let people vote with their feet on the day; maintain control if needed by determining topics in advance
- Use visuals to engage people in visioning work
- Combine some of the networking and educational benefits of a conference event with some real work
- Use interactive and fun energizers to help get peoples' brains into a dopamine rich state – but ensure these are designed and led by people with the skills to carry this off.

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