

Case Study: Building a Strengths-based Culture of Customer Service



Overview

The leadership team of a 1200-employee business unit wanted to strengthen their ability to work as a team while they led an initiative to create a culture of customer service across the organisation. Through the design of a tailored leadership inquiry using surveys and focus groups, and introduction of a strengths-based mindset through the Strengthscope suite, the leaders gained insights to guide them while they developed a more AGILE approach to service improvement. Nine months after the engagement concluded, the leadership team were continuing to use a strengths-based approach and had exceeded several KPIs on customer service. A strengths-based approach can be effective in a number of challenges, including culture change, multiple team alignment and integration, and increasing employee motivation and company results.

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Key Goals

The specific challenges the Directors and Executive Director wanted to address were:

- Determine how well employees understand good customer service and feel empowered to deliver it.
- Understand what hinders the organisation in successfully delivering good customer service.
- Increase the leadership team's effectiveness in leading the organisation through change.

Consulting Design & Delivery

Phase 1: Engagement and Leadership Inquiry

Talent Futures reviewed the existing customer service data, employee surveys, and the customer service strategy. We designed an engagement and leadership inquiry to complement the customer service strategy. This comprised:

- Focus groups on customer service behaviours and the ability to work cross-organisationally for the three management tiers below the Directors.
- Conducted quick 10-minute surveys on understanding customer service and motivation tailored to the work of each division.
- Observation of three leadership team meetings, and feedback to the team.
- Design and delivery of a two-day workshop on the themes of the Inquiry.

In the first two-day workshop, the data themes were shared with the directors through the lens of three critical Engagement factors: **Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose**. The Attitudes, Values, and Behaviours of employees, including the underlying reasons for them, were discussed in detail. Comparisons across the four divisions within the business unit were made. The Directors' assumptions about low employee understanding and capability were dispelled. Instead, the key hindrances to customer service were specific communication problems between divisions and faulty technology at the lowest levels of the organisation. A dispersed workforce complicated by a recent restructure also made working together as a whole unit more difficult. The senior team set change plans in place, and pursued a number of initiatives to address these findings and the findings of customer service experts.

Phase 2: Individual and Team Leadership Development

We focused on the leadership strengths of each director and how they worked together as a team. This comprised:

- Administration of Strengthscope360 with a one-to-one feedback session for each director.
- Executive coaching programmes for two of the directors, based on their potential.
- Design and delivery of a second two-day workshop.

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Prior to the second two-day workshop, directors each had their Strengthscope feedback. Prepared with new personal insight, they came together in the workshop to share their strengths and discuss how they are sometimes overused in the team. For example, the shared overused strength of Optimism in four of the five team members brought to light the tendency to optimistically gloss over the need for detailed implementation plans. Energised, motivated and with greater insight, the senior team approached their individual leadership challenges in new ways going forward.

Phase 3: Extended Leadership and Organisation Workshops

The organisation was keen to spread the new strengths-based engagement way of working to lower-level managers as well. Talent Futures was subsequently asked to facilitate a half-day for the broader leadership team of 32, and a day-long offsite for the entire management team of 60. In these events the strengths of individuals were recognised and participants solved a custom-designed realistic work challenge using a strengths-based approach.

Outcomes

Through the design of a tailored leadership inquiry and introduction of a strengths-based mindset, the team gained new ideas to help them as leaders while they developed a more AGILE approach to service improvement. Nine months after the engagement concluded, the leadership team were continuing to use a strengths-based approach to guide their behaviours and their engagement with staff. Their outcomes in their own words are:

- “In the workshop, we focused on one person each with whom we want to transform our relationship. We have stuck with that and each of these relationships has improved significantly.
- “Strengthscope was the catalyst. The commitment and belief in customer service that we developed through working with Talent Futures gave us the personal strength and motivation to reach out to the rest of our organisation, to try new things, engage with others, and has helped us deliver our Year 1 goals. Highlights of our achievements include:
 - *Promised response time on complaints* was at 55%, our Year 1 target was 85%, we achieved 88.3%.
 - *Customer satisfaction rate with the contact centre* was at 63%, our Year 1 target was 71%, we achieved 75.9%.
 - *Keeping our promises and commitments* was at 32%, our Year 1 target was 38%, we achieved 54.6%.
 - *Repairs and maintenance service* was 67.2%, our Year 1 target was 74%, we achieved 75%.
- “It’s been a great opportunity to engage with each other. [We now regularly] consider the individual strengths of those further down the organisation. We have managers leading on projects that aren’t necessarily aligned to their functions, but play to their strengths and their interests. This has built cross-organisation collaboration and enabled them to take a more strategic view of the overall service [we provide customers].”