



Drugs company tries new medicine

The People Development Consultancy Ltd (PDC) used the Margerison-McCann Team Management Profile together with another technique, Integrative Thinking, to help a major UK pharmaceuticals company overcome competitive, financial and cultural challenges.

The Challenge

Pharmaceuticals companies face a combination of external scientific and competitive challenges as well as internal organisational challenges, and nowhere are these challenges more pronounced than in the huge and rapidly moving field of cancer therapies. Treatments over the past 20 years have been revolutionised, helped by the emergence of molecular redefinitions which break down broad areas into lots of different smaller ones. The scientific challenge is to understand all those smaller areas.

There is also an intense competitive and financial challenge. Oncology is no longer a niche area: all the major pharma companies are investing in it heavily. Yet the likelihood of coming up with a big 'blockbuster' drug is small: the focus instead is on developing drugs that create small incremental changes in outcome, or target small subsections of any particular group of cancers.

The internal challenge for many pharmaceutical companies is no less severe. Getting a new drug to market depends on several different groups – scientists, clinical development and commercial people – working together. But historically they've worked in silos, in a disparate and un-integrated fashion.

Five years ago Bryony Douglass*, vice-president of oncology and infections for one of the UK's biggest pharmaceutical companies, realised that if it was to meet the scientific and competitive challenges facing it, her company (let's call it DrugsCo*) needed to change the way it worked. "I had spent

five years on the management team of oncology and it was very clear to me that, like many large pharmaceutical companies, we didn't have all the answers. We also had different perceptions about what the problems were," she recalls.

She turned to The People Development Consultancy (PDC), an organisational psychology and coaching firm, for help. "I'd worked with [director] Fiona Houslip previously and, among other interventions, she used the Team Management Profile which is a very useful, and very clever, tool for helping to address the operational problem of getting teams to function better. But I realised that we also had a fundamental cultural problem to address – the belief that we were the experts and had all the answers, when what we really needed to do was to look outside."

The solution

The approach that The PDC took to help Bryony with what she calls "the large-scale challenge" that DrugsCo faced, was to combine the Team Management Profile with another tool – Integrative Thinking.

Integrative Thinking is the ability to hold in mind two opposing ideas simultaneously and use the tension between them to construct something new and superior. James Gairdner, director of the PDC, explains.

"Integrative Thinking is a concept pioneered by Roger Martin, dean of the Rotman School of Management in Toronto, Canada, and author of numerous books, including *The Opposable Mind: How successful leaders win through Integrative Thinking*. His research with business leaders over a period of 20 years or more led him to conclude that in terms of what they do, the approach leaders take differs from person to person and is highly context driven. However, the thing that differentiates the most successful leaders from the rest is the way they think when they are making decisions. He identified a common pattern: when facing tough

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choices the best leaders can hold two diametrically opposite things in view at the same time, understand the logic behind both, and break the models apart in order to keep the best of both worlds and use that to create a superior solution.”

Integrative Thinking is highly complementary to the Team Management Profile, explains James: “Both are about understanding different perspectives – but Integrative Thinking takes the insights the Team Management Profile gives people into their own and others’ perspectives and allows them to do something with the difference.”

Both tools have a core truth, he adds. The Team Management Profile reveals clearly how people’s different preferences affect their attitudes and approaches to work, and that we all operate (albeit unconsciously) according to our own personal view of the world that has been tacitly constructed through our experience, culture, conditioning and so on. Being aware of this core truth is a good thing – but we can’t switch off that thinking.

“How often when we disagree about something, or get into conflict with someone who has a different view, do we dismiss them as ‘stupid’, ‘devious’ or ‘obstructive?’” asks James. “And our way of dealing with that is either to fight or to try to avoid the issue. Integrative Thinking gives people the tools to help them constructively deal with that tension to come up with creative solutions. It starts from the premise of gathering different views about how the problem might be solved rather than seeking the ‘right’ answer. So Integrative Thinking changes the definition of conflict, which becomes something you move towards rather than seek to avoid.”

The PDC likes the Team Management Profile, says James, because it’s “a very visual and tangible way of articulating the differences between people and a great way to start an Integrative Thinking intervention.” However, he continues, wherever people sit on the Team Management Wheel, most tend to fall into one of two camps – either ‘contented model defender’ or ‘optimistic model seeker’. “The first camp believe they already know the ‘right’ answer and their task is to convince others that this is the case. The second, while they also have an answer to the problem, view this answer as just a model, believe there could be a better model and see their role as being to work with others to try to find the best one.”

But Integrative Thinking forces divergent decision making: “You have to consider lots of different features, and rather than trying to reduce those, understand instead that

everything is relevant. You wade into the complexity rather than pretending that everything is very simplistic.”

And while this process might appear to be slow and time-consuming, it is actually more efficient and effective than traditional approaches to decision-making because it is more solid and collaborative, adds James.

The PDC uses the Team Management Profile and Integrative Thinking in a circular relationship with each other, and over the three years that it has been using them in conjunction, has seen, says James, “dramatic increases in collaboration across teams in client companies.” And those shifts have been most pronounced, he adds, in helping to bridge some of the classic functional divides – sales versus marketing, finance versus marketing and, in pharma in particular, science versus commercial.

The result

In DrugsCo, the PDC and Bryony Douglass used the tools first in Bryony’s management team, then among a larger group of 30 people, junior as well as senior, from different functions and divisions around the business. “We used the tools to help us identify the problems, identify where we had been operating under mistaken assumptions, then work out which issues were addressable and brainstorm potential solutions,” recalls Bryony. “For example, we can’t solve breast cancer because it is a very complex disease, but can we identify areas within it that we can work in and succeed in?”

The approach turned on its head the typical ‘change’ process advocated by the big strategy consultants, by putting cultural change well ahead of organisational change: “We examined what success would look like, how we needed to behave to achieve it, what sorts of people would make it happen, and then, last of all, how we should organise to make it happen.”

People were empowered, she says. “They really wanted to have their voices heard and by doing so they felt they could make a difference. In a three-month engagement process we rolled out the intervention to all 800 people in the organisation. The upshot is a much more collaborative business.”

The process has brought undoubted value, she concludes. “The combination of the two tools is an excellent way of engaging the people who need to find new ways of solving long-standing problems.”