

case study

Costain leads the way in driving up Quality of delivery through Talent Management

"Crelas has helped us to successfully create the link between recruitment, assessment, development and business outcomes. This enables us to continue to deliver excellence for our customers."

**Jeremy Galpin,
Group Skills and
Development
Manager, Costain**

Quality is one of the key critical differentiators in the UK Construction industry. "Making quality pay is a fierce struggle that you have to focus all your attention on if it is really going to help you thrive" says Nick Edwards, editor of Construction News magazine.

At the head of delivering quality projects are the Project Managers. In construction and civil engineering projects, most of which last for a number of years, it is the ability of the Project Manager to get the best from a complex web of stakeholders, including Planners, Designers, Engineers and Clients, that can make the single biggest difference to project success or failure.

"Effective project management can be the most significant influence as to whether the project is a success or not" says Jeremy Galpin, Group Skills and Development Manager, Costain.

Resourcing high performance Project Managers represents a significant talent management challenge for organisations such as Costain that seek to deliver excellence.

Finding such talent outside of the industry is tough and Costain decided to look within, to grow their own talent, designing and delivering their own project management academy.

An award winning project management academy

To tackle this challenge, in 2007 Costain set up a forward looking and highly targeted Project Management Academy to build skills and engage employees in the changes required to improve.

A number of Costain's industry-leading project managers were profiled to identify the precise combination of technical knowledge, competence and behaviours behind their success, as well as the optimum phases of career progression.

Four key areas were elicited from the research helping to set clear benchmarks for Behaviour, Personality, Motivation & Cognitive ability. World class frameworks such as the Schroder High Performance Leadership Framework - a highly validated and renowned behavioural framework –

were used to underpin the research and subsequent benchmarks, to create a robust profile of what excellence looks like.

The precision with which this was defined ensures that all participants are clear of the goal, what they can do to progress towards it (there are nine levels, from graduate to project director), and the contribution that excellence in project management will make to the business strategy to "be number one."

Considerable emphasis is placed on enrolment in the Academy, with all nominations supported by the Board. This helps to create a sense of anticipation and inspiration about the journey ahead.

Once on board, delegates are first evaluated for their career aspirations, current technical abilities and project management knowledge and experience. This is followed by rigorous assessment against a newly-defined role profile to identify learning needs, using key behaviours based on the Schroder high-performance behavioural framework – such as conceptual agility, enabling openness, forming concepts and empowering action.

Assessment tools include one-to-one interviews, 360 degree feedback and a development centre including psychometric assessment. Because project managers lead in highly complex dynamic environments with multiple stakeholders, the development centre was created to assess behaviour through a fast-moving civil emergency simulation that showcases high performance behaviours.

Every Academy delegate is supported to create a personalised development plan with a pathway trigger to get to the next level, and receives regular feedback throughout the planning phase.

Particular attention is paid to helping individuals unpick their mental model of how they operate now, what will need to change to support their development and how success will be measured. Measures include targeted professional

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qualifications through the Association of Project Managers, behavioural change measured by 360 degree feedback and project level metrics, such as project profitability, customer service, quality and accident frequency rate.

Development is unique for each person and includes specific on-the-job assignments as well as coaching, mentoring and off-site development workshops. A full learning cycle model is used and as much emphasis is placed on behavioural development as is placed on gaining appropriate experience and technical skills.

A successful partnership

The application of clear progression through the Academy in combination with project metrics and behavioural change monitoring provides powerful data to motivate continuous improvement and continuous motivation to strive for change.

90% of the academy community now have a five year career plan and the academy has successfully influenced the design of the succession planning process across the whole of Costain. The knowledge level of academy members, which is measured using the Association of Project Managers' Body of knowledge scoring, has increased by 19%.

Costain are measuring the long term impact of the Academy by benchmarking project performance using our project Assessment Tool based on EFQM. Due to the nature of construction projects it takes time to establish trends and impact but Costain are confident that combined with other Targeted training interventions the PMA will demonstrate a positive impact on project performance measures.

Other Academy programs run by Crelos have demonstrated that those individuals who develop the fastest outperform their peers by as much as 20 percent. The Costain Academy is addressing a key business need by driving change through engagement in skill development and praise comes from outside Costain as well as within.

ConstructionSkills, a sector skills agency for the construction industry is a direct supporter of the academy and described it at a ConstructionSkills forum as "a model of best practice project management development in construction."

Internal support for the Academy is demonstrated by continued investment and by feedback from participants who describe the Academy as "critical to their current development and achieving future career goals."

The academy has also been recognised amongst industry peers as an outstanding intervention, recently winning the Training Award at the Construction News Quality Awards 2009.

The future

Following the success of the Project Management Academy, Costain is now using the robust Project Management Academy Framework to support better recruitment decisions in a cost effective manner. Potential candidates for Project Management roles go through an individual assessment utilising proven and robust objective assessment techniques in order to assess their fit to the PMA Framework. This may include a



Behavioural Event Interview exploring their past experiences to elicit their fit to the behavioural profile as defined in the Framework as well as a suite of Psychometric questionnaires and tests to understand their match against the Psychometric benchmarks as defined in the framework. This new

recruitment process has the potential to strongly improve the return on investment of recruitment and selection decisions in the project management area.

"Crelos has helped us to successfully create the link between recruitment, assessment, development and business outcomes. Specifically, their expertise in psychology has enabled us to create a unique and insightful model of 'what good looks like' in a Costain Project Manager. The Costain Project Management Academy provides us with an industry leading model to accurately measure and stretch our people to reach their full potential in developing talent - identifying succession - and recruiting successfully. This enables us to continue to deliver excellence for our customers" said Jeremy Galpin, Group Skills and Development Manager, Costain.