

Consulting – Case Study



“Challenging and changing corporate norms comes with self realisation and a strong team ethos. This is where Sareos have really come through for us, and why I see them as part of our change team and not just executive training consultants.”

- Wayne Earp, Managing Director, Severn Trent Services

Executive Development

Building a high performing leadership team

Executive Summary

Severn Trent Services (“STS”) is a member of the Severn Trent Plc. group of companies; it is a part of the global arm of Severn Trent that works outside the regulated water business, where their products and services are used the world over. From filtration and disinfection equipment to contract operations and analytical services, STS water treatment technologies and services help protect and preserve the world’s most precious resource.

At the time of our engagement the company was faced with defining a new strategic direction, which would require standardising and integrating the different operations of STS in the UK into ‘one single business’, a business with an employee population proud to be a part of ‘one’ business.

Equally as important was the need to build a high performing leadership team that was able to work side by side to construct and deliver a programme of change to execute the strategy.

To deliver such an important result, required highly specific programme of development designed to bring the leadership team (“top team”) together as “one team”, to help them gain an appreciation of each others leadership styles and apply their learning in real time to genuine business challenges, problems and tasks.

As a result of the programme the top team are now “singing with one voice” and are even more equipped to take the business forward to take advantages of emerging opportunities. There has been a marked improvement in the quality of interaction between individual members and across the business. The top team is role modelling the behaviours of a high performing organisation. The level of creativity and imagination that has been released is starting to transform the organisation, which is resulting in faster, and clearer decision-making – critical to the execution of the new strategy.

Our pragmatic approach, and depth of relationships built with the team is such a short space of time was instrumental to the success of the programme.

Client Issues & Key Challenges

Due to the different natures of the different business operations, the different company cultures, the different processes and procedures and the different leadership styles in each operation, there were four core challenges to overcome:

1. A smooth transition of change and culture
2. Increase employee engagement
3. Breakdown silo thinking and approach
4. Create new innovative ways of thinking

To optimise results from the transition and improve upon out of date behaviours, old ways of thinking and continuously improve performance required the top team to display a high level of relationship intelligence, as well as, be seen as a cohesive high performing team that are congruently aligned in their beliefs, attitudes and leadership behaviours across their distinct business areas and STS as a whole. It was clear that the success of the programme would be inextricably linked with the success of the leadership team working together as 'one' high performing team.

Core Project Objectives

- i. Increased self awareness with the aim of increasing personal effectiveness and personal performance
- ii. For the 'top team' to operationally work and perform as one team, and be seen by others across the business as doing so
- iii. For the each direct report to have the personal skills and relationship intelligence to be able to adapt and meet the variety of emotional needs of their team members and wider STS population
- iv. Awareness of the '*leadership shadow*' cast by each member of the 'top team' and how their actions and behaviours impact / effect those around them
- v. Increased personal confidence and self belief in their capabilities that they can deliver the smooth transition of change and facilitate an increase in employee engagement
- vi. To easily understand the diverse communication needs of stakeholders and how to use this knowledge to maximise results
- vii. The smooth integration of historical and current cultures
- viii. Commitment to building a High Performing Team culture and consistently delivering excellence
- ix. An improvement in the direct reports ability to give effective feedback that drives performance and challenge the status quo
- x. An improvement in the strategic leadership skills and executive management capability of the direct reports

Project Overview

The project was structured into three phases of work, with a decision point after each phase to ascertain the core business benefits at each stage and to adjust the programme as needed to support any new business messages / changes at the time.

Phase One took place over a 10-week period and focused on self-awareness, self-realisation, understanding the leadership qualities / capabilities of the top team and what it means to be a high performing leader in STS.

Phase Two took place over a 4-week period and focused on ethical leadership, how to do the right thing – the Severn Trent way, and how to improve employee engagement.

Phase Three was a two-day programme that focused on enhancing the speaking skills / capability of the top team, how to connect with an audience and how to move an audience emotionally. The core emphasis of two-days was how to communicate the new strategic direction to create buy-in across a diverse range of audiences.

Our Approach

The programme began with each member of the top team completing a personal *Spiral Dynamics* values profile.

Spiral Dynamics is a model that maps the different values and thinking systems that are the basis upon which people (and organisations) make their decisions and choices. Its insights and wide application to all levels of human systems, from the individual to the organisational, make it unique among developmental change and profiling models.

The Values Profile provided insight into personal values, thought processes, strengths, weaknesses, blind spots, what held people back, what causes stress, what motivates them and the actions and behaviours they consciously and unconsciously take in work.

More specifically, it provided (as a minimum) detailed information into how each team member's thinks, feels and behaves about working in a team, driving and delivering results, dealing with conflict, attitudes to rules, success, motivator hot buttons, contribution, developing others, strategic thinking and commercial acumen.

Once complete, each member of the top team received personal feedback and support to help understand and interpret the outputs from their profile. The outputs were then used in conjunction with 360° feedback received from line-mangers, peers and direct reports to produce a personal development plan that ran alongside the programme to support the top-team in their development.

The outputs from the individual *Spiral Dynamics* profiles were shared with their peers and then the outputs were reviewed from a 'team perspective'. The purpose of which was to help the top team optimise their performance as leaders. In this session we specifically explored:

- Their collective strengths as a team
- Their enablers for success

- Their team weaknesses and barriers to success
- What motivates them as a leadership team
- How they need to communicate with each to improve performance
- What they need to do to make better decisions

The Spiral Dynamics session had the following additional benefits:

- It was the first time the team had individually and together identified personal strengths and weaknesses at a level of conscious thinking and then took the time to understand how their “individualism” impacts positively and negatively on collective performance and results.
- It was the first time the top team had identified and took ownership of critical barriers to effective communication and then together, identified solutions to overcome these.
- All of the above, led to more informed coaching and PDP conversations where the top team identified areas they needed to modify their thinking. This was because there was a collective realisation that it is their thinking and how it is filtered that drives how they show up and perform as leaders and examples to others.

The *Spiral Dynamics* sessions were built upon even more by the top team exploring authentic leadership, their leadership style (the good, the bad and the ugly), their own personal values and beliefs. This continued to build mutual trust, respect and a strong bond as the team realised their personal values aligned with STS, enabling them to become even more advocates for the business and new strategy.

Our conscious and unconscious thoughts about the world in which we live have a direct influence on our behaviours, which is why at the end of Phase One, we embarked on a further insightful session to support the outputs from *Spiral Dynamics*, with evidence of how the top team behaved in a team using *Belbin*.

Belbin helped each person to understand the similarities and core differences about how they viewed their leadership behaviours compared with how it was actually received by others in their peer group and direct reports. We then used *Spiral Dynamics* and *Belbin* together to show how each person system of thinking was directly linked to their good and bad behaviours as leaders.

In addition, *Belbin* enabled the top team to recognise the full range of skills and capabilities in their team roles and come up with a plan to optimise their collective strengths and performance as a team.

Phase Two of the programme began with a programme on Ethical Leadership and how to lead with courageous integrity. This session was considered important to the top team for the following reasons:

- i. Ethics is no longer optional; it is absolutely crucial to the sustainability and success of businesses today. Furthermore, Society expects companies to have the ‘right’ culture to facilitate ‘good decision-making’, but Executives today often find themselves faced with difficult decisions in difficult circumstances where the decision is not ‘black and white’, so how do you decide what’s right and then find the courage to do it?
- ii. In the UK, the new Bribery Act 2010 places a **specific legal requirement on Boards of all UK companies** to show leadership, to have “adequate procedures” and take “all reasonable steps” to embed the right cultures and behaviours to mitigate the risk of bribery, corruption and fraud.

- iii. To facilitate discussion about the Severn Trent new code of conduct – “*Doing the Right Thing, the Severn Trent Way*”

The outcome of this interactive session was to equip the top team with a leading-edge decision making framework, that will ensure they make the RIGHT decision every time and help STS deliver leadership and behavioural excellence so that STS ‘*lives*’ an open, honest and trusted environment in which everyone can succeed – The Severn Trent Way.

The core content of this programme was from the groundbreaking work of Professor Roger Steare – *ethicability*[®]

With a 9 year track record across all major business sectors worldwide, *ethicability*[®] has become a de facto benchmark and standard of excellence in leadership, culture and ethics programmes. A sample of the blue chip companies that are using the *ethicability* include HSBC, BT, BP, BSkyB, PwC, Barclays, Lloyds TSB and RBS.

A client recently described *ethicability*[®] as being “gold plated” because it has been publicly endorsed by the FSA, Serious Fraud Office and CASS Business School.

As part of this session, the top team also completed an integrity profile called *Moral DNA*.

Amongst many other benefits, *Moral DNA* demonstrated to the top team how they could be perceived as being “out of touch” from their teams and lower grades, how their communications styles if too “matter of fact” could be received as a lack of care and what action they needed to take individually and collectively to create a community of belonging, where everyone consistently demonstrated the right ethical behaviours rather than the new direction and code of conduct be seen as ‘just another initiative’ imposed from above.

This was a such a powerful programme, that Sareos has gone on to roll-out a wider ethics programme across the a further 60 managers at STS, to support the wider roll-out of their ethics training, “*Doing the Right thing – the Severn Trent Way*”. More information is available on this from Clayton Ainger at clayton@sareos.co.uk.

The next part of the programme was a master class in Employee Engagement; Despite being an already successful business, this session was considered of high importance because recent engagement surveys (in certain areas) has scored low results.

Given the importance of the new strategic direction achieving a high level of engagement was critical, therefore the aim of this session was to build the skills and knowledge base of the top team on how to engage such a wide variety of people, from a variety of cultures that have traditionally be managed in different ways. In this session we covered the following core areas:

- How to lead through ambiguity and change
- Understanding the needs of my employees
- Emotional Intelligent communication
- Relationship intelligences and how to build long lasting relationship.

Phase Three of the programme, Presenting Naturally, was a two-day programme that focused on enhancing the speaking skills / capability of the top team, how to connect with an audience and how to

move an audience emotionally. The core emphasis of two-days was how to communicate the new strategic direction with heart, passion and to create buy-in across a diverse range of audiences.

One further area of support, that still continues today, is the Sareos teams involvement in informal coaching sessions with top team members. These sessions help establish an even closer working relationship and deeper level of trust between the STS and Sareos teams.

Outcomes and results from Wayne Earp, Managing Director, STS

We have achieved our best ever business performance over the past 12 months. Key performance indicators targets for safety, operational, and financial performance have all been exceeded, with zero lost time injuries, two gold RoSPA awards, lowest leakage, and strong top and bottom line growth in tough UK markets.

In parallel we've been developing our model for how the business needs to change to increase market share as the water industry itself changes. How much of this is down to the outcomes and benefits from the "one team initiative" is difficult to quantify but it's equally difficult to argue that the visible changes in team and individual behaviours haven't played a part.

So, what has changed? Here's my top 5:

1. Communications to people across the business are more frequent and open.
2. Senior managers sponsor initiatives outside of their silos and there's greater promotion of the business as a whole rather than its parts.
3. Small things matter, for example, hand written Christmas cards to all our people, and images rather than words to describe how success feels like
4. A commonality of purpose that wasn't visible to the business 12 months ago
5. Tangible support for each other and greater respect

In short, the orthodox way that the business has operated is being challenged and the top team is more comfortable and confident. There remains a challenging journey ahead to achieve the sustainable levels of employee engagement and business performance that we're aspiring to but the starting point has been the right one.

Conclusion and Feedback from Managing Director, Wayne Earp

Embarking on the "one team initiative" programme required something of a leap of faith. Could we afford the time commitment? Would each of my senior team get behind it? Would it really translate into different behaviours in the business? Would I see a return on the investment? These are just a few of the questions I asked myself at the outset and why it was so important to find the right consultant to work with. Tackling the softer issues is hard but the rewards are ultimately greater than driving more tangible performance measures, and creating the right culture is at the core of a sustainable long-term business. Starting with the top team is the foundation for achieving this.

We discovered a lot we didn't know about each other and a fair bit about ourselves too, and we enjoyed finding out. The feedback from the team speaks for itself and it's credit to Sareos for leading us through at a pace and level of challenge that moved us outside of comfort zones and enabled us to grow as a team and as individuals. A real measure of value added from Sareos was the personal coaching that was freely given to a number of team members, myself included, and the way that this has contributed to meaningful personal development plans. In conclusion, Sareos have delivered more than an executive development programme; they've worked alongside the team in true partnership.

Feedback from other Top Team members

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Sareos over the past 10 months. All trainers have been very engaging and extremely knowledgeable. From a personal point of view I have learnt a great deal about myself, the values that I embrace and what makes me tick. I have also learnt how to quickly identify what is important to others and as such how to engage with them in the most positive way. This has led to greatly improved working relationships with my colleagues and my team along with a better understanding of our customers and what is important to them.

- Peter Woodliffe-Thomas, Sales Director, STS

Working with Sareos over the last 10 months has personally been a hugely insightful and enjoyable experience. Their fresh, enthusiastic approach in particular has helped me understand more about myself and how I relate and interact with my colleagues, clients and stakeholders in the business environment. The knowledge and energy the trainers have brought to every session has been second to none, allowing me to become a more rounded and better leader. Thank you Sareos! I mean it, thank you!

- Kane Horton, Divisional Manager, STS

There have been many benefits for me from the work we have done, the key ones would be:

- *A better understanding of the people in the top team and, more importantly for me, a better understanding of how the rest of the team views me.*
- *A much better understanding of the influence I have within the team and the influence I have in the day-to-day business.*
- *Alignment on the future vision and culture we want to develop within the business and the critical leadership role we all play in delivering them*

I have taken many of the aspects of the work we have done and already introduced them into day to day business - e.g. we have started a "one team" initiative with C2C first line managers and the engagement ideas we talked through before Christmas were delivered (personal Christmas cards, screensavers, lottery tickets) and are now embedded into the business (through surveys, team projects). I have really enjoyed the experience and have taken a lot from it.

- Dave Godfrey, General Manager, STS

Undertaking the Spiral Dynamics One Team Initiative programme gave me a fundamental and clear insight into why I think the way I do. It has developed my thinking away from the automatic to consider broader ways of thinking and more importantly to consider how others think and how better to relate to and lead them. The course has been great fun, which was an important feature to open the attendees up and create a neutral playing field from which to move forward. The business has benefited through a clearer understanding of how my peer group works and therefore how we work better together, and an improved understanding of the greater team through the separate Sales and Operations initiative.

- Greg Weatherdon, Tenders Director, STS

We have been working with Sareos for 10 months and my first introduction came at a time when I had just been seconded into a more senior management role and joined a completely new group of people in the STS top team.

The motivational and positive attitudes encouraged me from an early stage especially when I felt like the "new girl". I grew in courage to speak up and say what I believed. I feel I have now moved from being a manager to a leader. My confidence to lead has grown from the discussions we have had as a top team during the course sessions and I fully understand where our business is heading.

- Lorna Bown, Acting General Manager, STS

Post-Event Review

Following the successful completion of the Top Team executive development programme Sareos has been further engaged by STS to deliver a development programme for their Sales and Operations team and to roll-out an Ethical Leadership and Ethics Train-the-Trainer programme for 120 line managers in the business.

Separate case studies are available for both these programmes.

For more information on how Sareos can help your organisation, please contact us on **0844 740 1278 or by email at deliveringexcellence@sareos.co.uk**