

Strengthening commercial capability of a global, multi-disciplined organisation

Background

As an essential plank in increasing its competitive edge in deal-making of large complex deals, the CEO of our client (Royal Dutch Shell) decided to establish a world-class commercial “Skillpool”.

Considerable work was done to establish a common approach across the Shell Group and included aspects such as:

- creating an externally-benchmarked assessment process ; “champion deal leaders” were accredited to lead the biggest and most complex deals
- developing & running a comprehensive suite of learning and development programmes
- building an active, networked community amongst the deal leaders & deal makers across Shell’s global businesses who shared learnings and identified/dealt with common issues/challenges

A senior cross-business group was set up to steer the work of the “Skillpool” and build traction/impact across the organisation.

The challenge of making such a change across the company was considerable given the historically strong and independent lines of businesses, spread globally. The challenge was heightened since the focus was on the largest, most highly profiled, complex and significant deals. A key feature was that ownership and commitment across the company would need to shift in order to implement common ways of resourcing and doing deals.

Our role

We were asked to provide advice and support to help catalyse, build & sustain this significant change process underway in the company, in order to generate a real difference in deal making. Our work extended over several years and has included the following:

- ***Acting as advisor and thought/partner*** to the head of the “Skillpool” core team, helping create linkages and continuity as different people took on this role.
- ***Operating as a full team member of the cross-business team*** (who were charged with establishing, building and supporting the growing “Skillpool”) - taking responsibility to lead specific areas of work, as well as supporting and challenging other key areas of work underway.
- ***Helping to build a wider sense of common ownership and community*** amongst deal makers. As Shell was in the early stage of developing the “Skillpool”, this was done primarily through a number of key events for deal-makers and deal-leaders. Some examples of this were:
 - Co-designing a major event with senior leaders of the “Skillpool”, and then coaching them to lead the event. This was seen as a key “watershed” event.

Using that design, creating local and regional events for deal-makers. This helped build understanding about the “Skillpool”, share some of the newly established

practices and behaviours, and build a sense of ownership and identity/community amongst the group.

- Co-designing and facilitating workshops for groups of accredited deal-leaders. The purpose was to leverage knowledge and experience amongst the deal-leaders, raise key and common issues, and continue to build a sense of community.

- Co-designing (with “champion” deal leaders) and then helping orchestrate the first “summit” of all accredited deal-leaders in the “Skillpool”. The purpose of this highly successful event was impact on the way that deals were approached and done. Key issues raised at previous workshops were identified and worked through.

- ***Contributing to the growing impact of the “Skillpool” in doing better deals.*** Taking responsibility to co-design and provide commercial workshops for local staff “in country” (e.g. in China) in order to make a substantial impact both on actual deals underway and on the commercial capability of deal makers in the Regions. These have contributed to a real shift for the Group.

Outcomes

The “Skillpool” has made considerable progress. It is a recognised catalyst in Shell’s ability to leverage the strength of the Group in creating differentiating market propositions. (And our work has been recognised as being part of that story)

The “Skillpool” is well grounded with common practices established. There is a real focus on excellence by a growing cadre of highly respected, accredited deal-makers who actively connect and operate cross-business. In addition, the commercial community is widening and standards are being set across the organisation which impact a wider group of people involved in commercial transactions.

Learnings & reflections:

Capability building and operating using a common new way of working across a large global organisation is a significant change process; it takes time and focused effort, support and overall leadership.

Building ownership and relevance amongst deal leaders has been of fundamental importance, as has leadership by senior leaders across the organisation who have guided and steered the “Skillpool”.

Dedicated support for this centrally, by a small working group (led by a respected deal-leader), has also been key, as has the way they’ve gone about their work, i.e. they have continually sought to do their work in such a way that builds ownership within the members of the deal making community, rather than keep the central group as the main “movers and shakers” of the “Skillpool”