

CASE STUDY

VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas)



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The Challenge

Judith Brodie joined as Director in January 2006 to drive VSO UK forward and immediately identified some initial challenges that had to be tackled.

The first pressing challenge was for VSO UK to increase its performance and delivery as the group had missed its volunteering targets for some years. Judith also wanted to build on the success of the fundraising department who had met their target for the previous year.

There was also the issue of the culture of the organisation. Due to performance and delivery as well as leadership changes some of the staff felt that VSO UK was an organisation in decline. *"The 125 strong UK operation is full of bright and dedicated individuals who clearly want to make a difference but I really felt that there was a lack of expressed ambition and aspiration,"* says Judith.

"This wasn't just personally, it was also corporately - there was no corporate growth ambition. When you have an enormous need worldwide, and we can give great value through our highly skilled volunteers, why would you not want to do more of it?"

The third key challenge was that of the structure of VSO UK. There had been an organisation redesign three years previously but this resulted in lots of tiers of management that created a complex

structure and hierarchies. However, as VSO UK had been through constant and considerable change, any further change needed to be handled sensitively and followed through, as there was considerable 'change scepticism'.

Judith Brodie met Shaks Gosh who had been a trustee at Impetus where Judith had previously worked. *"When I spoke to her about my needs, she mentioned Bath Consultancy Group who had provided pro bono work when she was CEO of Crisis. My ears pricked up as they sounded exactly like the type of organisation that could help."*

Judith approach Bath Consultancy Group outlining her needs and requirements and VSO UK was taken on as a pro bono client.

The Approach

The three challenges that Judith outlined are interlinked and could not be dealt with separately. To tackle the structure issue and make the desired difference to performance and delivery, the culture of the organisation needed to be moved. Bath Consultancy Group also advocated working closely with the UK Senior Management Team to help deliver the change.

The project was led by Jane Speller and involved Nick Smith alongside other Bath Consultancy Group consultants.

"I immediately took to the approach that Bath proposed," said Judith. *"I knew that I needed to change the structure of the organisation, but Bath brought home that any change had to be holistic and you needed to engage on different dimensions to deliver the change."*

Bath Consultancy Group designed a three-stage process to be delivered over a 6-month timeframe.

Stage 1: Kick-start the change by involving everyone. Get understanding and buy-in, surface data about why things are as they are and how things will need to change.

Stage 2: Work with the UK Management Team to help deliver the change by 'behaving' the change they wanted to see. Instigate the formal consultation process regarding the new structure, redundancies plus the creation of new job descriptions. Slot employees into new jobs and structures.

Stage 3: Getting going as the 'new' organisation.

The Stage 1 events focused on achieving buy-in to the desired organisational changes, to share responsibility for change widely by creating a shared vision about what is possible, and to consider desired behavioural changes at the individual, team and organisational levels. The events were designed to ask lots of questions and collect data about what is happening in the

organisation, why change is difficult where things seem stuck, and where change is most likely to be welcomed. The aim was to get everyone involved and heard in a way that was clear and yet not over-consultative.

Jane Speller comments: *"At the first whole organisation event, we noticed that people were very quick to fill flip charts with words and drawings. They were very open about expressing how it was to work in the organisation. But when asked to come forward to start projects or focus on specific areas of enquiry, people held back. They obviously work very hard but we needed them to concentrate on working smarter to achieve the organisation's goals."*

During this stage four enquiry groups were formed that addressed:

- Customer care
- Internal Communications
- Leadership and Management
- Links and interdependencies

LEARNINGS

These enquiries became central to the change process. They were consulted and referred back to at every stage. *“People needed to see that we weren’t just talking about things but that change was happening and their ideas were included.”* comments Judith. *“We were able to carry these themes through and that helped tackle the cynicism.”*

During the second stage, Bath Consultancy Group focussed their attention on the UK Senior Management Team. The intention here was to help members of the team realise that they needed to behave differently - in line with the changes they were advocating - to create the kind of transformational shift they were seeking. As Judith Brodie says: *“This was crucial and one of the most significant aspects. Initially the team consisted of five others and myself. It was a team that had not been used to working as one, so had to undertake quite a significant mindshift to start thinking strategically and coherently about VSO UK as a whole rather than just running individual functions. What Jane and Nick did was help the team see how VSO UK needed to change.”*

Another whole organisation day was planned this time led by the Senior Management Team with Jane Speller in support. It provided an opportunity to inform the organisation of the changes and to reinforce what was required at an individual, team and leadership level. Another important element was to collect reflections on the process and

consider how to continue to work together in the future.

Bath Consultancy Group also helped the senior team look at the clarity of communication around the strategy; structure to deliver it; whether individuals and teams were clear about their roles; tackling poor performance; strengthening customer service and working more efficiently across the organisation.

“Redundancies were part of the structure change and we also helped other people move on,” reflects Judith. *“It’s never comfortable or satisfying but at times, for the good of the organisation, you have to make this significant shift. We handled this as sensitively and carefully as possible, significantly supported by VSO’s new HR & OD Director.”*

During this period, 16 posts were made redundant and seven new posts were created. *“Creating a new structure and changing a culture is a difficult process. The Senior Management Team did some very good work and although when people were helped to move on it was bruising, the team could hold their heads high about doing a difficult job well,”* says Jane Speller.

The third stage was about getting going as the new organisation. To support this final stage, Bath Consultancy Group worked with Judith and her new senior team to think about ways of consolidating the new middle manager group. A day was designed

and run to help the group of 30 managers work together more closely and to realise their important role in continuing the changes.

Achievements

VSO UK has undertaken a major restructuring and change process in only a few months. Bath Consultancy Group helped to work through every stage of this process with VSO UK.

Judith Brodie says: *“We’ve got the feeling of a fresh start for VSO UK, and much of this is due to the work of Bath Consultancy Group. We’ve got a newly formed UK management team and I feel very confident about taking the change forward. They have provided us with a sense of continuing change and helped us build a platform going forward.”*

Mark Goldring, VSO’s international CEO, said that organisational success would be achieved if every leader would: *“be ambitious, be accountable and be flexible.”* VSO UK is now in a position to achieve this on an organisational, department, team and individual level.

