



CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

GWM WATER

SITUATION

The outcomes of a staff satisfaction survey conducted at GWM Water in 2007 identified, amongst several things, the need for better leadership and improved internal communications within the organisation.

SOLUTION

Leading Teams was engaged to work with the senior management team to initially develop and strengthen the relationships within the group. This engagement extended to the Emerging Leaders program and around 25% of GWM Water people have been involved in a Leading Teams program.

RESULT

GWM Water has become a much more cohesive organisation since Leading Teams first commenced working with the water authority, with a number of successes underpinned by the progressive achievement of changed behaviour, improved attitudes and more open communication.



ABOUT GWM WATER

Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water (GWM Water) is a Victorian statutory corporation that delivers urban and rural water services and sewerage services to the Grampians, Wimmera and Mallee regions of Western Victoria.

SITUATION

The outcomes of a staff satisfaction survey conducted at GWM Water in 2007 (known as the Voice Project) identified, amongst several things, the need for better leadership and improved internal communications within the organisation.

Former GWM Water Managing Director Jeff Rigby chose to release the results of the staff survey “warts and all” to the whole organisation.

“I felt it was important to be completely upfront about the survey results. We understood the organisation wanted better leadership, and we wanted to deliver better leadership. Releasing all the results was the right way to start.”

Jeff said that as a leader in the business he felt a level of personal responsibility

for the feedback at the time, as it was a reflection of his role and the other leaders in the corporation. *“You have to respond when you get that kind of feedback from your people. And being in the MD role I felt I was able to effect the improvements the staff were looking for.”*

The issues also reflected significant changes that had happened to the organisation, the first of which was an amalgamation of two separate water authorities in mid-2004 that created GWM Water. The evolution of the new entity was also being challenged by significant pressures associated with:

- the impact of prolonged and severe drought on the organisation and the region, both in the lead up and subsequent to the merger; and
- high expectations and demands from government and the community as the organisation set about successfully delivering one of the largest and most notable water infrastructure projects in the nation’s history.

“Capturing the hearts and minds of our people was paramount. In a changing environment you need to have your people with you, and you need to work with them to embrace change,” said Jeff.

The organisation needed improved leadership through stronger and more collaborative internal working relationships. It was also clear that better ‘team player’ attitudes and behaviours would lead to greater accountability and responsibility for actions and results.

COMMITMENT

Leading Teams was engaged to work with the Senior Management Team to initially develop and strengthen the relationships within the group. The management team knew they had to get the new business structure right and they knew their leadership style had to improve.

Leading Teams Director and Facilitator Kraig Grime said that Leading Teams often gets called in when a business recognises a need for something to change. *“The trigger is generally a ‘centre of influence’, and it’s not always the CEO or MD, it could be the board when the management team is not able to see the problem.”*

Kraig worked with the GWM Water management team for two years. *“After that, we reached a point where the Executive Team and the Divisional*

Management Team each needed to take their own path and meet as discrete groups.

It took a while for people to embrace the program, especially the peer review component. Jeff said he 'went first' to set the example. *"It was important for me to lead from the front. The feedback was a bit clumsy at first but it was all done with the right intention and for the right reason. It was about helping me and helping each other to improve. I knew I must model the behaviour."*

The Leading Teams model itself is very simple. It's built around the creation of a trademark that defines expected behaviours where people's actions can be held to account to those defined behaviours. As Jeff says, it is not earth shattering – but the challenge is in the implementation!

"Good implementation requires a highly skilled facilitator who can adapt on the spot, who can push people but never too far, who can extend comfort zones and create new boundaries for people they never thought they might be able to achieve. Kraig absolutely created this environment at GWM Water, his real strength and capability in coaching absolutely came to the fore when facilitating our sessions."

RESULT

Subsequent staff satisfaction surveys conducted in 2009 and 2010 demonstrated a significant improvement in almost all metrics compared to the 2007 situation, with some results improving by as much as 30%. Jeff said,

"Much of this improvement can be attributed to the leadership development effort delivered and facilitated by Leading Teams."

Generally speaking, GWM Water has become a much more cohesive organisation since Leading Teams first commenced working with it, with a number of successes underpinned by the progressive achievement of changed behaviour, improved attitudes and more open communication."

In particular, the Divisional Managers have improved out of sight.

"They are well equipped with the skills, confidence and maturity to go it alone, and are now in a self-managed phase. They know if they start to slip up they can call in Leading Teams for support to get back on track," said Jeff.

Kraig said, *"The DM's are addressing performance issues and have certainly improved. They are having better 'conversations', though are still loath to hold people fully accountable for their performance. That is their next step and they are ready for it."*

Cultural change requires top down support, vigilance and time. Jeff said, *"I think that you can drive culture and behaviour change as an individual, but you need broad ownership to really make it work. I actively involved our HR manager at the outset and he became my counterpart champion of the Leading Teams model in the business."*

You must also have the passion to see it through, this should be led from the top but you also particularly need the executive and line managers to be strong promoters and keep everyone on track. Over 25% of our people have been actively involved with a Leading Teams program - that's a significant level of involvement," said Jeff.

Kraig said the program has changed since he first started with GWM Water. *"Every program facilitator is guided by what they see and what they think is needed for the group. We regularly sit down with the stakeholders and check in to see how things are going. Serious modifications happen at the end of each contract – this is a natural part of the program. Tweaks occur during the program based on what is happening in the group at the time."*

In terms of how long companies should commit to a program of cultural change, Kraig has clear advice.

"We don't facilitate one-off sessions with companies as a general rule. I am absolutely committed to sustainable change, which means long-term commitment. Throughout the number of years I've worked with my clients, my role as facilitator changes with the business and their needs."

"To say there is an end point for this work implies you can totally achieve the culture you want and there are no human issues around maintaining it. Most people, when under pressure, are at risk of reverting to what used to be. Therefore, there is always a role for an effective external facilitator," Kraig concluded.