



“ The Programme created a ‘Project Community’ who had Remploy’s best Interests at heart. Project managers shared experiences and passed on best practice, there was great team spirit and the team wanted to perform, people affected by the Programme were at the top of everyone’s agenda. ”

Harry Atkinson, central operations project manager

# BUSINESS OF CHANGE

Remploy won the APM Programme of the Year Award for a broad-reaching modernisation programme of its factory network.

**HELPING** people with disabilities find sustainable work has been the goal of Remploy since it was established in 1946.

But fast forward 60 years and Remploy was faced with major challenges to equip it for the future and prepare it for significant changes to the economic, social and political landscape.

The emphasis had moved away from supported employment in a sheltered environment towards supporting disabled people into mainstream jobs alongside non-disabled colleagues.

These changes were brought into sharp focus in October 2005 when a report from the National Audit Office highlighted the relatively high cost to Remploy of maintaining employment for disabled people in its factories.

At the same time, the government was preparing the way for a competitive market in welfare to work provision that would see both commercial and social enterprise organisations tendering competitively for funding.

The basic idea was that supporting disabled people into mainstream

employment would cost a fraction of subsidising Remploy’s own factories. For every factory job costing £20,000 a year, Remploy’s specialist recruitment services arm could help five disabled people into mainstream work.

It was clear that the balance of Remploy’s business had to change.

To meet the challenges set by the government, Remploy planned to modernise its business, with a significant number of factories earmarked for closure.

Remploy operated a disparate group of businesses with little in common other than the fact they employed people with disabilities. It had more than 80 sites throughout the UK from Aberdeen to Penzance, ranging in size from 12 employees to more than 200.

It was recognised early on in the modernisation programme that Remploy didn’t have the resources to manage a programme of this scale and complexity, involving multiple concurrent projects in many different locations, together with overall programme management and co-ordination.

A key part of planning and preparation was therefore to use expert help to build a project and programme capability that was equal to the task. Project and programme training provider CITI was engaged to help.

Training Remploy’s own staff, rather than engaging large numbers of external project managers had to be carefully managed. The involvement of an external consultancy naturally caused concern amongst powerful stakeholder groups including unions and employees..

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities were agreed from the outset and a number of key people including directors, senior managers and department heads were seconded to the programme.

Remploy employees filled the majority of these places (84 per cent) with CITI staff filling the rest, providing a valuable blend of experience and expertise. This was a crucial factor in implementing such a sensitive programme.

Due to the nature of Remploy’s work there were a number of policy issues that directly affected the lives of a large number of vulnerable people. As a result the company had to be seen to act responsibly at all times, and comply with regulations - all under the close scrutiny of government and other bodies.

### Clarity

To ensure that there was complete clarity about the objective and responsibility of each individual project, particular attention was paid to project initiation. A Project Mandate (equivalent to a Project Initiation Document - PID) was prepared



for each individual project. This was agreed and formally signed off by the project manager, the relevant business manager, and the programme director.

In addition to clarifying the mission, the mandate effectively defined the ‘contract’ between the programme and each individual business to carry out the change. Mandates were publicly signed and distributed at a specially organised event. This had the additional benefit of ensuring that all concerned understood that each business was ‘bought into’ and agreed the change.

### Standard approach

At the early planning stage of the programme, product-based planning was used to define standard approaches to particular types of projects (e.g. closure, transfer, and merger). These provided standardised project ‘templates’ which were used and adapted by individual project managers. This approach greatly reduced technical complexity, simplifying management and reporting of projects in different business areas and different parts of the country.

This standardised approach meant that reporting could be consolidated at programme level, giving clear visibility and tracking of progress to the Project Support Office, the Programme Board and the Executive Directors.

Despite all the challenges, the

programme ran smoothly. Objectives were achieved and benefits delivered. Financial benefits included the cost avoidance of £148 million over the life of the plan from site closures and £30 million from the transfer of business activity from closing sites to retained sites.

Key stakeholders were satisfied with the outcome and in the first year of the plan, Remploy operated within its funding target and also met its job outcomes target.

### Capability

As a result of the project, Remploy was left with a highly developed, tried and tested project and programme management capability. The company demonstrated a new ability to manage and deliver complex change on a large scale, based on a clear plan.

The success of the programme can also be measured by the company’s rapid progress towards achieving its target of funding 20,000 jobs in mainstream employment every year for people with disabilities and complex barriers to work by 2013.

Last year Remploy supported more than 10,000 disabled people into sustainable jobs and confidently predicts that the numbers will rise to 30,000 by 2012-13.



2010 APM Programme of the Year Award sponsored by Program Framework.

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