

CASE STUDY

CLEVEDON FASTENERS



The Programme

Clevedon Fasteners is a specialist manufacturer of cold pressed components for the automotive and related industries. Over the seven year period from 2001 the company has more than doubled its turnover through organic growth. After putting 10 of its key managers through a management development programme, Clevedon realised that there were still various problems within the company that were hindering further growth and innovation. So, in February 2007, the company embarked on the Skills Academy's Quality Improvement Tools (Q-IT) programme to improve its ability to apply effective solutions to challenging business issues.

The Skills Academy's Q-IT course is a process improvement programme which runs on a modular basis over a period of six to eight months, designed to reduce employee downtime away from the business. Five managers from Clevedon Fasteners were selected to lead five critical projects for the company. The participative nature of the course meant that managers had to quickly assemble cross-functional working teams that were tasked with applying real time learning on projects in the workplace. Overall nearly 60% of the firm's workforce was involved in solving problems ranging from contract review and production planning through to stockholding, warehousing and tooling management.

The Q-IT programme, which consists of a core six days of six sigma based problem solving techniques, was facilitated by experienced trainers and black belt coaches. At each stage, the Clevedon Fasteners' project teams took the learning immediately back into the workplace to find actionable solutions to the business problems identified.

"Initially we saw the five projects as very discrete problems but we soon realised that, in fact, they were all linked. The course made us realise that we needed to look at them as a whole; we hadn't seen that at the start."

Bob Moore
QA Manager

Six months of collaborative work-based learning through the National Skills Academy for Manufacturing (the Skills Academy) has helped cold-formed components manufacturer, Clevedon Fasteners, increase its on-time deliveries by 160% whilst simultaneously halving its warehouse stock. The result is a more cross-functional working culture and market oriented business which has realised cost improvements and value added savings of nearly £500,000.

Facilitating Cultural Change

As the cross-functional project teams started to think and enquire about the problems, they began to act in a way that enhanced collaboration and discussions across the company. By taking this holistic approach to the five distinct problems, Clevedon teams were able to work together and use their collective intelligence towards creating the solutions.

Following the first module, which covers the 'Define' stage, the Q-IT programme moves on to 'Measure' and 'Analyse'. The rigorous nature of the course sometimes proved challenging, particularly around the technical content. However the diverse range of backgrounds of the participants meant that they were able to communicate understanding and share problems and approaches through a peer learning process.

Delivery performance is critical in our business and in securing good quotation success rates," continues Bob Moore. "We began the course believing our delivery performance was 90% but the Q-IT programme introduces a stringent analytical process and through following this we discovered that we were using the wrong measurement criteria. A truer measure was to look consistently at what we had promised the customer. By using this more representative metric we found our true performance was 32% on time delivery. This meant that we had to face up to a rather unpalatable truth and admit that we weren't as good as we thought we were."

Real Business Benefits

By accepting the reality the company was able to keep an open mind, as it moved through the 'Improve' and 'Control' phases of the course, to find optimum solutions to help it achieve its objectives. Out of the contract review project came the realisation that Clevedon routinely took on work from customers that it didn't have the capabilities or resources to handle, or that resulted in damage to tooling. The teams subsequently focused on understanding what the true capabilities and strengths of the company were and how to stop accepting every job that presented itself.

Inevitably, implementation of new solutions to problems means that people have to change what they do. The Q-IT programme recognises that managers need to sell change to help employees embrace new behaviours. The skills for change workshops gave Clevedon managers the communications and related skills to be able to have the right conversations, deal with conflict and resistance and influence people to implement new systems and processes.



Clevedon Fasteners Factfile

- Birmingham-based Clevedon Fasteners Ltd specialises in the manufacture of cold-formed components for use in the commercial and automotive markets world-wide.
- Formed in 1939 to supply the aircraft industry.
- With 26 employees, turnover in 2008 is £3 million.
- 264 square metres of warehouse space and factory premises.
- Manufactures from ferrous and non-ferrous materials, in diameters ranging from 0.80mm (1/32") to 10mm (3/8") and lengths from 1.2mm (3/64") to 120.5mm (43/4").