



Name & Role

Patricia O'Hagan is the Managing Director at Core Systems (NI) Ltd in Belfast.

Organization

Core Systems has a staff of 22, working in Information Technology, specialising in state of the art security solutions for the Custodial Sector. Core Systems was incorporated in 2003, as a partnership with the directors at the 'core' of the business. The first big contract for Core Systems was with the Northern Ireland Office, to implement a Secure Image Processing System. Since then they have implemented a range of security applications ranging from biometric access control to biometric logon. They have also managed Complete R&D projects developing leading edge technology solutions for the security sector, as well as presented their ideas on Survivable systems at NASA. Core systems have been able to make key strategic partnerships with Pickerskill Kaye to develop new electronic locking technology and with Touchsonic on an interactive information kiosk solution for the US market. On top of all this they have been acknowledged for their work by making the Deloitte FAST 50 in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 achieved Investor in People accreditation.

Management Development

Core Systems is fairly typical of a small high tech firm operating in a highly pressurised work environment. In a small fast moving organisation important information was being bottlenecked at director level; leading to the feeling they were carrying responsibility for everything. The directors especially were working long hours and weekends, which also lead to the feeling of isolation.

Before M&L Development – Triggers

After having a project review it was clear that there were some difficult issues such as moral in relation to project completion, staff turnover, communication issues, staff didn't know what was happening or what was expected of them. With a large complex project coming up, the senior team decided that it was imperative to move to a more professional approach, to improve the business and get a good performance / project management framework in place.

Management & Leadership Development Activity

To help make changes to the work environment Core Systems decided to adopt a project management approach to their operations. After developing a project management methodology and process they trained all team leaders and managers in project management principals and methods. Core worked with another software company and implemented the ChARM system as a planning, communication and progress monitoring tool. All staff were trained in the project management process and the ChARM system. All new project managers are being coached and mentored through their first projects to help them understand their role within the company.

Actions, Outcomes and Benefits

Communication between all stakeholders has proven to be key for a successful project. Taking the initiative to support employees with leadership potential has shown that they are then more eager to take on new roles and responsibilities, sharing the load with directors. Team leaders have developed into effective project managers, managing significant work packages. By learning from experience and being able to identify what works and what doesn't for a particular project, helps future projects be more successful.

“Carry good practice forward – use successful project plans as templates for similar projects”

Benefits have been seen in 3 main areas of the company

Business Benefits

- Increased profitability
- Improved customer relations through better communication
- Improved business practice by incorporating business improvement objectives into projects
- Increased efficiency and productivity – reduction in rework and wastage

Manager Benefits

- Reduced stress
- More time off (do not need to work every weekend anymore)
- Improved staff relations – people are happier knowing what is going on and with what is expected of them
- Feel confident in delegating to people

Person Benefits

- Reduced Stress
- Improved moral
- Sense of achievement through working in a planned goal orientation framework, better understanding of role in project and contribution



Leadership Style

Setting a healthy work environment by leading, trusting the ability of the people around you and helping people see their full potential is a good place to start when it comes to leadership. Look at any setbacks or errors as an opportunity to learn for future projects. Also have a clear vision for the future and stick to it.

Barriers to Improving Management Skills

Patricia O'Hagan points to the main barriers within Core Systems *“Lack of confidence and access to good mentors, makes it hard to improve your work force. In the IT business people tend to be focussed on the technology whereas it is the way we interact with each other is the key to delivering a successful project. Employees need to be able to understand their strengths and weaknesses and need to be able to see that self development is a big priority towards reaching goals”*.

Overcoming these barriers has had a tremendous impact on the business and on the people.