

Investments

in training and development lead to business results

COWI: MEASURING AND DOCUMENTING RETURN ON INVESTMENTS MADE IN TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In collaboration with Mannaz, COWI is taking the lead when it comes to measuring and documenting real business results from investments made in training and development. But getting to that point has been a tough journey: one of transforming an overall strategy into measurable everyday actions. A journey that all started with a strategy of wanting to deliver outstanding project management.

With more than 17,000 ongoing projects around the world, project management is undoubtedly the backbone of COWI. And naturally, the performance of COWI's project managers is something the management of COWI is highly focused on.

The CEO of COWI, Lars-Peter Soebye, puts it in very clear terms: 'Projects are what we do, and becoming even better at delivering them is an important part of our strategy and a 'must win'-battle for us. Our strategy is born out of ambition and dedication, because we know that by delivering more effective projects we can optimise customer satisfaction and consequently strengthen the company'.

FROM STRATEGY TO RESULTS

Focusing on project management is not new to COWI. However, a central part of the updated COWI strategy is to develop an even more performance-oriented culture, and in order to change direction COWI



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decided to redesign the approach to training. Co-creation became a large part of the new approach, as did measurable training results and tracking changes in behaviour.

A valuable co-creation process was created by fusing COWI's internal business knowledge with Mannaz's in-depth knowledge of project management training.

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CHANGING BEHAVIOUR THROUGH TRAINING

One of the key issues that came out of the co-creation process was the realisation that although the project managers of COWI already were among the best in the business, COWI needed to further reflect the now even tougher market conditions in their training. The income potential on projects was not being fully exploited, and therefore the issue was to identify the most effective method of balancing customer orientation with a sound business approach to financially viable project management.

Dorthe T. Rasmussen of Mannaz elaborates, ‘We knew we needed to change the focus in the training, so we became very concrete and added case after case that would emphasise this point in the training material of the COWI Project Manager Academy. And we used blended learning methods, so the participants would get the same message in various forms.’

MEASURING THE RESULTS OF TRAINING?

However, being confident that the new training method would actually change behaviour was far from good enough. From the beginning COWI wanted to be able to measure the results of the training efforts.

Soebye explains, ‘It has been absolutely crucial to be able to measure the effectiveness of our investment in project management training. Tests have been added just before and after the training in order to evaluate the increase in knowledge. But more importantly, an on-the-job test is included four months after the program to measure actual changes in behaviour. So far these tests show clear improvements in changed behaviour. It’s a positive spiral movement, and we now see motivated project managers capable of putting relevant new knowledge into immediate use.’

IT’S A NEVER-ENDING STORY

Soebye has been involved in the process throughout, and he believes that the involvement of COWI’s top management has been important. ‘If we want the positive changes to keep spreading, we need to keep talking about this. I need to show that this is of the utmost importance to

COWI. It’s a never-ending story of which we have ownership. In our world nothing remains the same, so we need to constantly hone our project management skills.’

To emphasise the importance of project management, COWI has made project management a stronger, clearer career path. ‘We have made it more attractive to choose project management, for example by strengthening the Project Management Academy together with Mannaz. Project management is an interesting and challenging profession and I believe the organisation reflects that now,’ says Soebye.

IT’S ADDING UP AND LOOKING GOOD

COWI has managed to change the behaviour of its project managers through an innovative co-creation process using the strategy as the compass. The project managers have a stronger focus on optimising the financial potential of each project, and all of their general project management skills have been improved. And the process is still rolling. The big question is: Do the documented changes in behaviour have a direct effect on the financial results?

Soebye explains, ‘The business case to justify the investment in the Project Management Academy showed an upside on our financial results by launching this initiative, and the case turned out to be watertight. It is very satisfactory for us to be able to measure our efforts and investments, as it confirms to us the pace of our strategy implementation. In the end, strong project management is key for us in order to deliver healthy financial results.’

ABOUT COWI

COWI is a leading consulting group that creates value for customers, people and society through a 360° approach through world-class competencies within engineering, environmental science and economics. COWI has been involved in more than 50,000 projects around the world and has more than 6,000 employees. www.cowi.com



Lars-Peter Soebye is President and CEO at COWI. Soebye holds a Master in Civil Engineering and Construction Management. He has been with COWI since 1986, where he started as a project manager.



Dorthe Thyri Rasmussen is Client Director at Mannaz. She holds a Master in Economics and Quality Management and is a Senior Managing Consultant with more than 15 years of experience as Project Manager and Line Manager in large international corporations.

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