

An organisational development intervention in a South Africa Diamond Mine. 1988 - 1992

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During the period 1987 to 1992 a mine in a remote province of South Africa was embarking on a major project, that of going from an Open Pit Operation to a High Technology Underground Mine. This was a crucial period of change. In essence it was starting a new business and this change over had large scale ramifications for the organisation, which can be summed up by the world “flux”. The key issues that impacted on the mine were:

- changeover dynamics from open pit to underground
- socio - politico- economic factors arising from diverse causes such as the market, access to funds, apartheid, sanctions, skills shortages, growing revolutionary tendencies, white backlash and poor education to name but a few.

This vast new project held strategic ramifications for the group and it was essential for the underground project to come in on time, within budget and for production to reach the call. In 1986 it appeared extremely unlikely that this objective would be accomplished by 1992, with full production being in swing by 1993. The project was to be valued at over one billion ZAR (South African Rand) in 1991 terms.¹

In January 1988 a new general manager was appointed and he introduced sweeping changes. The general manager had a clear mandate to achieve the corporate intent and was given a free hand to do so. His willingness to lift levels of work and create large amounts of discretionary space were initially viewed with reservation by corporate and initially, with suspicion by the workforce and management.

A five year high level IV strategic plan was introduced with seven visions for each of the main operational areas of the mine. Each department translated the strategic level IV visions into level III operational issues which in turn were cascaded into level II and I for appropriate input. Over the next year focus was on obtaining the required resources needed to achieve the intent. Capital requests were submitted based on carefully prepared estimates that were shaped by inputs from all levels and the mine received the financial resources estimated to achieve the intent. Complement was increased to 2 700 with about another 1 500 contractors on site. A special department was set up to co-ordinate mine wide interventions. A number of events took place simultaneously as the new business began to take shape.

First and foremost was extensive involvement with all stakeholders. Buy in to the Strategic plan was essential. The General Manager and his top team committed a great deal of their time to briefing and feedback sessions. Regular climate surveys were undertaken and communication remained a top priority throughout the life of the five year plan. Comments from the work force and communities wherever valid, were acted upon. A revolutionary forum was also created to open the discussion on South Africa and Apartheid. The aim was to create a community in the heart of South Africa that reflected the spirit of what post apartheid South Africa might be like.

Career Path Appreciation and Levels of Works (Jaques, 1989; Jaques and Cason, 1994; Stamp and Stamp, 1993) were introduced in late 1989 and these processes were integrated into a context known as Broad Based Succession Planning© (Olivier, 1995)ⁱⁱ. The idea was to staff the organisation with spare individual capability and with the requisite skills and knowledge to take the mine into the future. In line with the concept of creating spare capability, no new appointments or promotions were considered without reference to a Career Path Appreciation interview and a personality profile. Organisational Mapsⁱⁱⁱ were created for the top team downwards to Level II and significant reshuffling and re-deployment took place in order to match capability to required work capacity. In line with the vision of equal opportunities, development and usage of capability, Broad Based Succession Planning

required that all employees had personal development plans created in line with their present capability and the post requirements. A succession plan was created for Level I to III. Each department had a one to five year human resource training and development plan that was reviewed annually. An affirmative action plan was introduced which over a three period showed great success. Career Path Appreciation was used in conjunction with more traditional skills based assessments were used and the initiative was fully supported by the branch level of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Broad Based Succession Planning operated with the Tripod of Work as a guiding framework, although in 1990 the tripod philosophy as we understand it today was not clearly articulated. It was implicit.

Management had firmly embraced the concept of the Tripod of Work and a suggestion and incentive scheme was introduced aimed primarily at improving the work themes of Quality and Service. Monetary prizes were not given, but success was publicly acknowledged through monthly award ceremonies that rapidly grew in popularity. The award ceremonies were always presided over by the general manager or an executive manager and the forum was used as an opportunity for creating congruence with individual achievements, the mission and visions and reinforcing the role and importance of Level I and II. In 1994 the ceremonies were still continuing and in 1992 these award ceremonies had saved the mine in the region of 3 million rand. The award ceremonies spread to individual departments and a complex labyrinth of semi autonomous award systems grew, all linked to the monthly awards.

Employees were regarded as all having a special role to fulfil and the ideas was to create a context within which the capability and discretionary space of work was unleashed. The success of the strategic plan was a direct reflection on the theory of tasking, trusting and tending.

By 1991 three key Organisational Maps© showed the organisation to be staffed at level IV, III and II with individuals who had the capability to not only operate at comfortably with their work, but had a measure of spare capability to stretch the discretionary space of their work. Work was mapped using a process called Post Profiling, with an overlay of the Levels of Work requirements.

1991 indicators showed that the mine was solidly on the path to achieving its vision. Industrial unrest had dropped to zero for two continuous years, underground metres mined had surpassed call and the technologies for production were by and large installed and operating. The previously troubled plant had managed to sustain call over its longest period. Morale was high, turnover had dropped to an expected level and the Mine was recognised by the group as being a leader in the fields of organisational renewal. During that same year production was discontinued in the pit and replaced by underground production. On time, within budget and within the targets and visions agreed to by the Executive Committee in 1989.

In the analysis made possible from a historical perspective it would seem blatantly clear that it was the concept of spare capability at the different levels that provided the major impetus. The leadership style allowed for an organisational culture that encouraged risk taking, experimentation, and personal growth, stretching one's capability and which recognised individual and team contributions. It could be argued that it was this capacity and focused leadership, combined with appropriate and timely resources that created a remarkable story of success and left a new benchmark of hope for the larger Group.

End Notes

ⁱ This was approximately US\$300 million in 1991 terms.

ⁱⁱ Broad Based Succession Planning is a Work level IV integrative planning and development tool for Talent Pool Management. It has a strong collaborative nature and seeks to integrate a large number of HR systems.

ⁱⁱⁱ Organisational Maps show visually the work levels of complexity and this can be overlain with individual capability for dealing with the work complexity.

References for further reading

Jaques, E and Cason, K. (1994) Human Capability. A Study of Individual Potential and Its Application. Virginia. Cason Hall Publishers.

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Stamp G & Stamp C. (1993). Well-being at Work: Aligning Purposes, People, Strategies and Structures. International Journal of Career Management, Vol.5, No 3.