

Leading through uncertainty without having all the answers

When a major transformation created uncertainty across the business, Interfloor needed its leaders to maintain confidence, communicate well and keep their teams engaged - even when they couldn't share the whole picture.

THE SITUATION

Interfloor, part of the Victoria plc group, is Europe's largest manufacturer of carpet underlay and flooring accessories.

The business was embarking on a once-in-a-generation transformation involving significant investment and operational change.

Much of the transformation plan was confidential and would need to be communicated in phases. Leaders were being asked to take difficult decisions, maintain performance and support their people without always being able to explain what was coming next.

THE FRICTION

The transformation itself wasn't the only issue. The friction was being created by the uncertainty surrounding it.

As the programme progressed, anxiety and speculation were growing. Morale, wellbeing and engagement were beginning to be affected.

Leaders wanted to support their people but didn't always feel equipped to address concerns or hold open conversations when they couldn't provide all the answers.

Communication was happening - but it wasn't always having the intended impact.

Activity isn't the same as impact.

THE FOCUS

Rather than treating this as a generic change-management or communications problem, we focused on the everyday leadership behaviours that would make the biggest difference.

Working across three leadership levels - Executive Directors, Senior Managers and First-Line Managers - the focus was on helping leaders:

- understand the emotional impact of change on themselves and their teams
- communicate honestly and compassionately when all the answers weren't available
- recognise early signs of pressure, disengagement and wellbeing risk
- create a clearer and more purposeful change narrative
- build the confidence to hold better conversations
- maintain focus and human connection during uncertainty

We also worked directly with the Managing Director, creating space for reflection, challenge and support as he led the organisation through the transformation.

Knowing what to do isn't the same as doing it well.

The work therefore concentrated on helping leaders apply these behaviours in the real situations and conversations they were facing every day.

THE DIFFERENCE

The work helped Interfloor identify issues early enough to change its approach.

The business developed:

- clearer and more aligned leadership communication
- greater confidence among leaders in addressing uncertainty
- earlier recognition of wellbeing and emotional risk
- a more coherent phased communication strategy
- greater focus on the human impact of organisational change
- a senior leadership team better equipped to lead the transformation

Most importantly, the work changed the way Interfloor approached communication during the transformation. Rather than simply concentrating on what needed to be communicated and when, greater attention was placed on how people were experiencing the change and what leaders needed to do differently as a result.

IN THEIR WORDS

We were already a few months into the change process when we started with AQR and it was transformative, not just for those around but for me as well.

It helped us recognise at thankfully an early stage some of the traps we were falling into, that we weren't getting the best out of our communication efforts, we weren't addressing concerns and weren't really watching for mental health impacts we were creating through the changes.

As a business we now have a much more coherent communications strategy and plan for each phase of the change process which clearly focuses on managing the potential human impact and ensuring that we take all of our employees successfully on this journey with us.

Gary Mcewan, Managing Director, Interfloor

THE AQR WAY

Find the friction. Focus on what matters. Measure the difference.

Performance happens in the everyday - in the conversations leaders have, the decisions they make and the way people respond when the answers aren't straightforward.

Diagnose before you prescribe.

01

UNDERSTAND

Notice the human impact of uncertainty.

02

COMMUNICATE

Create clarity even without every answer.

03

LEAD

Turn better conversations into confidence.