

## Engineered for growth



Intensifying competition, expansion into new geographical markets and the need to deliver smooth sustainable profit growth have prompted a new product strategy at luxury car maker Bentley. The Whole Vehicle Engineering division recognised that it needed to improve its team and cross-functional working if it was to contribute effectively to the new strategy, and it turned to the Margerison-McCann Team Management Profile for help.

### The challenge

Until recently, the fortunes of luxury car company Bentley reflected the lifecycle of every new product launch. The launch of its most recent family of cars, the Bentley Continental GT, in 2003 guaranteed the company eight years of strong growth. But by 2008, when recession hit, it had already acknowledged that its dependence on a series of product families was not sustainable, and that it needed to smooth its profit growth by the timed introduction of other cars to fill the gaps between one product-family launch and the next.

Ken Scott, director of the Whole Vehicle Engineering (WVE) division, explains: "The recession precipitated a long hard look at our product strategy. To create a more sustainable business, we needed to become more efficient in bringing new products to market, and also, as we moved into new geographical markets such

as China, we knew that we couldn't rely on the badge alone as an acceptable passport to customer satisfaction."

He continues: "The primary leadership challenge was to get people to see the direction we were going in and the part they needed to play in it. As part of that we needed to address attention to detail, motivation, willingness to compromise, teamwork and so on. There are lots of different strands to focus on, not one silver bullet."

And the tool Whole Vehicle Engineering chose to support the required change in team working was the Margerison-McCann Team Management Profile. Ken had done the Team Management Profile three or four times already, and, he says, "saw benefits every time."

Whole Vehicle Engineering plays a critical role within Bentley. It pulls together the various different components of the car made by a

number of different engineering teams and is responsible for ensuring that the finished car is of the required standard to go into the marketplace. The existence of the 'creak and rattle' sub-team is testimony to the importance Bentley accords to acoustics and aerodynamics.

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When Ken took over the division 18 months ago he realised that although WVE is essentially a department that solves problems, the 280 people who work in it neither saw it as such, nor worked in an efficient and integrated way to identify problems and tackle them at an early stage.



He explains: "They all concentrated on their own little bit of the process, each team working in its separate silo. I wanted to bring the department together and get them to work more cohesively."

He asked Naysan Firoozmand, principal consultant at business psychologists ASK, to do the Team Management Profile for the WVE team.

### The solution

Naysan recalls: "The team were all very willing to look at ways of doing things differently. They understood that they weren't working as effectively as they could have been, and that they needed to switch their focus onto preventing problems rather than fixing them. The company needs to get things right first time, and the very existence of the creak and rattle team epitomised the problem - it legitimised an inefficient approach, which had become self-fulfilling."

The Team Management Profile, he says, was an ideal fit with the company culture.

"Because the tool is scientifically robust, with relevant, jargon-free language, it has real credibility within the company. What's more, because it combines individual insights with the work context, it has immediate practical and commercial relevance. That was even more the case here: Ken was keen to combine the Team Management Profile with specific business issues the team was then addressing - not least efficiency improvements."

The first part of the day was spent discussing individual and team Profiles and the implications for teamwork. The discussion was augmented by a 360-degree profile that Ken had done for the whole team.

Ken takes up the story: "The team profile was bunched towards the Thruster-Organiser, Assessor-Developer and Concluder-Producer part of the Wheel, which came as no great surprise, and people recognised that the bunching was not ideal. However, there was one Controller-Inspector - but although we knew that he was

very good at reflecting and learning from the results of a project, the rest of us just want to get on to the next project, so he tended to get steamrollered. Doing this exercise made us recognise how valuable his skill set is and that we need to draw on it far more often.

"Similarly, we found other skills in the team that had become almost vestigial through lack of use, and we talked about how we could bring those into play at certain times to create a more even spread around the Wheel. Additionally we recognised that where we lacked the right skills, we could and should draw on them from lower down the organisation."

What's more, as Naysan adds, people can compensate for their natural preferences. "Typically people can be different things if they are required to be," he says. "The WVE preferences reflect the kind of organised approach that you would expect of a team that is working out problems and co-ordinating others to deliver the results. But the team needed to improve its communication, its ability to influence others and to reflect and learn from situations."

The conversation led naturally to where efficiency improvements were required and how the team could best work to achieve them. "For example," says Naysan, "if you're going to run a team meeting how do you ensure you get the most out of all the participants? I gave them all a profile and said: 'this is the kind of person you need to influence: how can you adapt your style to their preferences?'"

"And you have to consider written communications too. One of the agenda items was consideration of a particular document. Some people were frowning or scratching their heads, because they were reading it in a different way from what the author had intended. The exercise showed how different interpretations can arise. So we got them to think how they might rephrase a communication so that it lands correctly for its intended

audience - and they acknowledged that sometimes you need to involve people from that intended audience in creating the document in the first place."

### The result

By the end of the day, the team had a clear understanding of their collective strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and risks therein. They also had a list of actions designed to address some of the business imperatives Ken had outlined, using the knowledge they had gained during the day.



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"They were very positive," recalls Naysan. "They are bright people. They just needed a mirror held up to them to show them where and why things had gone awry. By the end of the day they could see a range of alternatives, and that allowed them to begin plugging the gaps straight away."

The quality of conversations within the overall team has improved, says Ken, and improvement projects are being tackled by cross-functional teams. Moreover, the fact that Bentley is delivering more new products to the market without growing headcount in WVE suggests things are moving in the right direction.

People have taken personal ownership for their changed behaviours and have promised to hold each other to account. And Ken has asked Naysan to be involved in quarterly team meetings this year to help consolidate the changes and to integrate further team development with actions required to achieve team objectives.

"We keep sprinkling water in it to ensure it keeps growing," says Ken. "We'll know we've got there when the creak and rattle team have nothing to do!"