



Quality in Mind

Responding to Regulatory Pressure and Instilling Confidence to Challenge, 2014-5

The client:

A global manufacturing organisation

The challenge:

Every day, our client is under the watchful eye of the regulator. There is always the threat of penalties and if quality slips their license to operate is in jeopardy. So how do they prove they're serious about consistently keeping quality high across lots of manufacturing sites? A transformation initiative had created a new set of values and behaviours for the whole organisation. But the client knew something was missing: a way of shifting these abstract value statements into understanding, action and change at the front line.

It was here, at the front line, that transition from word to deed was vital – individuals understanding the change and sharing responsibility in carrying that through in their work. It was also crucial that frontline staff gained the confidence to speak out on possible quality issues and even challenge peers when needed. Then there was the scale – the number of countries and factories represented in the organisation. How to make something that works in multiple languages and cultural profiles with a measurable impact?

Sparknow was invited to transform an abstract framework into something tangible and meaningful, something that those on the front line felt they had ownership of, something that boosted confidence – both in the teams that were rolling out the process of how to have more frank and challenging conversations, and in those staff who would be impacted most. The success of the project rested on participating staff trusting that their voice and experience counted, and that they felt empowered to have the conversations that couldn't previously be had, and to know they would be heard.

The outcome:

Sparknow designed and built a custom toolkit to guide and support managers to have strategic conversations with their teams about quality and behaviours – a mix of storyboards and facilitation guides supported by coaching sessions and videos. The toolkit was translated into 18 languages and has led to an improvement in quality across the sites. Conversations about quality are now a regular occurrence and there is a greater sense of confidence and shared responsibility at the front line when it comes to raising issues and concerns.

Notes on approach:

Several of the design features in both product and process had great benefits:

- Managers had to be at the heart of the solution to make a meaningful, sustainable change. But managers aren't necessarily skilled facilitators, so the toolkit was designed to fully equip them to run a conversation that is constructive but also encourages frank conversations without blame. This is where storytelling technique came into its own, allowing managers to hold positive yet challenging conversations about quality with their teams.
- Teams were galvanized into having rich and meaningful conversations about quality in sessions run by Sparknow, which drew visual and emotive clues from real-life incidents on the manufacturing floor. This grounding in real life gave the tool edge and credibility, and drew in the front line. Integrated visual design made it a coherent international intervention, quick to roll out and adapt.
- Manufacturing operators in the organisation were the target group when it came to embedding new behaviours, but are not generally computer-based in their roles. Knowing that sometimes low-tech is the best tech, Sparknow created a series of engaging posters that could quickly and easily be delivered to any factory, in any country, in any language and by any manager – great scale and impact for a low investment. The central team were also given tools to track quality improvements and new ideas emerging, giving them both the data and insight to confidently report back to their regulator.
- The process of gathering and selecting stories that informed the toolkit offered value to the client in and of itself. Using a journaling technique designed to wake up "attention density", key managers started to notice quality in their daily lives – that it's about small moments as much as big incidents. Several managers found it so useful to their working lives they said they'd go on doing it. The story-gathering process was also one of engagement. Staff felt they had made this happen together, rather than it being foisted upon them, and this led to an open, receptive mindset. We find this practical application of neuro-theory's SCARF model (which you can read about in *Rewiring the Organisation*) makes people feel that their autonomy is being rewarded, greatly diminishing kneejerk resistance to what could otherwise be "yet another change initiative."

Key words:

Quality, behaviours, culture, journals, storyboards, compliance