

THE CHURCH KITCHEN



The potential to perform

Strengthening corporate memory.
Accessing critical knowledge, 2014-5

The client:

A UK based regulator.

The challenge:

After years of growing, adapting and responding to increasingly complex regulatory challenges, a UK based regulator knew it was time to take stock. Time to scrutinise the knowledge stocks and flows that supported the robust decision making at the heart of being an effective, efficient, future-proofed regulator. What was working well? What needed restructuring? How could they look ahead to playing the most influential role in the sector, making sure that their decisions ended in real benefit to their users? The client invited Sparknow to carry out a rapid cultural assessment to unearth hidden strengths, blockages, assumptions and patterns of action and inaction. The client wanted greater depth of field on both their culture today and their cultural ambitions for tomorrow. They were searching for the whys, hows and in what ways the organisation should evolve – not simply for survival but for success. This marked the beginning of an 18-month journey that culminated in the design of a wholesale strategic transformation programme.

The solutions:

Sparknow worked with the client over an 18-month period in three chunks of work to:

- Analyse the environment and diagnose efficiency of current ways of working and knowledge sharing; what was successful, what was proving challenging. To produce a cultural assessment report which gave the senior leadership an overarching narrative, giving them the insight they needed to then decide what to do next to improve the organisation's effectiveness.

- Design and facilitate a series of events that gave space for the entire organisation to co-create a knowledge charter. A process that shifted responsibility onto an individual level, built understanding of the critical influence of sharing knowledge in delivering the organisation's remit well and making the mission and narrative "ours" not "the company's".
- Consolidate all existing knowledge activities and tools into a map, which led to the next stage of building knowledge management tools that could be used time and time again. As opposed to starting from scratch every time.
- Coach and support the senior leadership team to clarify their vision for the change and rehearse how they would invite the rest of the organisation to share in that vision.

"Sparknow have played an influential role in opening the eyes of a predominantly analytical and rational organisation to the myriad of factors that affect performance, efficiency and effectiveness. This is evident in the range and depth of discussion that now happens quite regularly."

Transformation lead

Notes on approach

- Our timeline interview method built a richer narrative that enabled senior leaders to reflect on the level of change the organisation had faced both from within and from challenges in the world outside. These insights helped them make the next step in readiness to engage in transformation work.
- Key moments of growth from the interviews were mapped into a multi-layered visual timeline which allowed the organisation to reflect and recognise the journey they had been on and what that meant for the next step in their transformation. The timeline process highlighted how entrepreneurial, effective and responsive the organisation had been at many times in the past, placing today in its longer context, and building confidence that the capability already existed to propose and achieve ambitious transformation. "We've done it before. We can do it again".
- By offering three different ways into the diagnosis Sparknow ensured that many voices were heard in the recommendations. This was to increase the likelihood that the change solutions would be adopted across the organisation as people felt their individual experience was a valuable thread in the larger story.
- The face-to-face meetings in the middle phase of the work were a key part of the process, bringing recommendations to life and translating them into tangible shared actions. The facilitation linked process with product, providing breathing space to work with colleagues, explore dimensions of the culture through moments of dilemma or day to day obstacles, and reflect on shared mission.
- Sparknow's Narrative for a Change technique proved particularly powerful in guiding a leadership team with many differing views to create a shared vision they could articulate well and with integrity. Sparknow's Walking in Their Shoes technique provided a neutral space in which an analytical leadership team gave themselves permission to explore the human resistances to change that are hardwired into us at times of turbulence. They could then develop engagement strategies that worked through resistances in order to power the transformation forward into the next chapter for the organisation.

Key words

Knowledge, regulation, governance, networks, strategy, culture, timelines