

Growing talent at the Fairtrade Foundation



® **Background**

The Fairtrade Foundation is responsible for licensing the FAIRTRADE Mark to products in the UK. The FAIRTRADE Mark is an independent consumer label which appears on products as an independent guarantee that disadvantaged producers in the developing world are getting a better deal.

The Fairtrade Foundation is a charity, but the nature of the work involves a lot of interaction with the commercial world and retail. With wider awareness of the FAIRTRADE Mark, the Foundation works hard to balance tensions and challenges that arise from the pressure of fast growing commercial environment.

Challenge

In recent years, the issue of fair trade has become more mainstream which has seen wider and more frequent press coverage. As one of the authoritative sources of information on ethical trading, the Fairtrade Foundation has grown tremendously in response to growing awareness and a demand for the FAIRTRADE Mark. From just under 20 staff in 2004, there are currently over 70 staff and a number of volunteers in 2007! With such rapid recruitment, staff retention was crucial to meet the pace of change at the Foundation. Keeping and growing their talent was an imminent priority.

=mc's brief

Martin Tyler, Head of Finance and Resources at the Foundation, approached =mc back in 2006 to see how =mc could help. He says, "rather than always bringing new people in at a senior level, it makes sense to invest in the great talent we already have. Not only does it make sense for succession planning, but increases our capacity by tapping into our existing potential."

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CASE STUDY

=mc was asked to focus on two areas. Firstly, to ensure that staff were equipped with the appropriate skills to work effectively and collaboratively. Secondly, senior and middle managers needed to develop their strategic skills to support the expansion of the Foundation.

What we did

In consultation with Martin Tyler, we moved forward with a training approach. =mc examined the Fairtrade Foundation's requirements to develop a series of bespoke training programmes delivered in-house. These included: managing multiple priorities, performance management, project management, and specialised programmes for new and aspiring leaders. The emphasis in =mc's programme design was always to relate the content to specific work examples at the Fairtrade Foundation.

“We’ve worked in partnership with =mc for almost 2 years now, during an exciting period of growth at the Fairtrade Foundation. They’re able to provide us with a range of approaches and techniques that help us to grow some of our great talent here at the Foundation.”

Martin Tyler, Head of Finance and Resources, Fairtrade Foundation

Results

Specifically, the results for the Fairtrade Foundation so far have included:

- a more “joined up” approach to project management
- a shared understanding of different management styles that can be adopted
- a clearer view for middle and senior managers of the strategic planning process and how they can support it
- a peer support mechanism for middle managers, many of whom are new in their post and have to respond to and adapt quickly to the changes at the Foundation

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Feedback from the Foundation has been fantastic. As Martin Tyler says, “we now have a higher standard of management skills across the organisation. More noticeably, managers are thinking more strategically – the programmes have nurtured a culture of problem solving. Our staff realise their responsibilities in building solutions as individuals and teams, and that it’s not always up to senior managers. It’s this mentality that gives us confidence that the Fairtrade Foundation will be in a stronger position to meet future demands and changes in our area of work.”

Want to know more?

www.fairtrade.org.uk – for more information about the Fairtrade Foundation.

Or contact Moi Tu, =mc’s Practice Manager on 020 7978 1516 or email m.tu@managementcentre.co.uk to find out how we might be able to help you.