



## Developing the Senior Management Team at Ultra Electronics

### **The Client**

**Ultra Electronics is an international group of businesses specialising in the design of electronic and electromechanical products and also software systems for the aerospace industry. It supplies approximately 60% of the sonar buoys used by navies around the world and currently employs 2,500 people.**

### **The Challenge**

**Ultra Electronics had been expanding steadily through acquisition for some years and had finally run up against the inevitable growing pains that come with the merging of disparate corporate cultures. This was reflected in the make-up of the main Board.**

**The Chief Executive had been in place for 10 years. The newly appointed Marketing Director, Andy Hamment (whose views are those quoted throughout this case study), had been with the company for some time as Managing Director of one of the subsidiary companies. Two other main Board members had been at Ultra Electronics for a matter of months. The newly appointed members of the Board were settling in well but there was a view that the development of the Board needed to be accelerated.**

### **Why OPDC?**

**For a number of years OPDC had been involved in training, coaching and developing middle managers at Ultra. The senior team at Ultra had received good feedback about OPDC from their managers and concluded that OPDC was ideally placed to design and run a high level programme for them.**

### **The Intervention**

**OPDC and Ultra Electronics jointly identified four main objectives for the development programme:**

- 1. Team-building: to develop Ultra's senior management as a cohesive team**
- 2. Management Techniques: to learn and apply management models and interpersonal skills**
- 3. Business and Strategic Planning: to improve business and strategic planning techniques**
- 4. Implementation: to apply all of these to situations facing the company in the real world**

To ensure that the development programme was effective both in terms of costs and good use of the time spent out of the office by top executives, the formal team development took place in three two-day and one one-day modules over a period of five months.

This approach had two major advantages. Firstly, it was flexible enough to allow the application of frameworks and models to be based on the “live” issues that emerged from Ultra’s business activities during the lifespan of the programme. Secondly, it meant that each module had a dual or triple purpose i.e. training, development and solving business issues.

## **The Outcome**

### **Team-building:**

Like many other companies, Ultra Electronics discovered that although its senior executives, for the most part, shared a common vision they did not necessarily agree on the means of getting there.

“We have discussed with OPDC’s facilitation our fundamental and deeply held values. There is a high degree of agreement which leads to shared values, and the disclosure of these values to each other really helped to build the team.” said Andy Hamment.

“We are able to air issues of concern in a very open fashion, based on giving and receiving feedback in a non-threatening manner.”

“OPDC have given us a mechanism for discussing contentious views safely. This can either be an ‘experimental’ suggestion or it can be a disagreement as to what needs to be done.”

“The OPDC events have taken us from ignorance to trust and have demonstrated to all of us how much better we are if we work together as a team. They made us realise that we all have things to contribute to areas outside our own particular disciplines and that if we have a problem, the SMT is there to give mutual support.”

### **Management Techniques:**

Executives who have made it as far as the Board tend to be forceful personalities. Groups of such strong people do not always achieve the best results unless they are prepared to play to their strengths and recognise their weaknesses.

“Our meeting management has improved considerably. Whilst we sometimes need to remind ourselves to do it, we do normally decide the roles within the meeting and then stick to them. Understanding the different roles of agenda items has been enormously useful in allowing productive discussion before we rush off to try and make a decision.”

### **Business and Strategic Planning:**

When discussing mission statements, vision, values and strategy, many Boards find that strong differences appear between their members. The raising of “useful disagreements” can help them bring rigour to their final conclusions, provided that they have the capability as a team for working through those differences.

**“The OPDC technique is proving to be an excellent method of communicating what is really important in the company. It is also a super vehicle for facilitating discussion amongst a wider group of individuals that challenges, refreshes and improves the strategy on a continuing basis.”**

**Implementation:**

**The most common criticism of management programmes is how their relevance to the actual working environment can wear off once executives are faced with the distractions and practicalities of their day-to-day working lives. Ultra’s experience with OPDC was quite the opposite - as the Board observed, the higher up the organisation the approach was implemented, the more relevant it became to the entire company.**

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