



## RedSky Learning

*A Powerful combination*

Using the Margerison-McCann Team Management Profile and Linking Skills Profile in conjunction can be a powerful way to help firms achieve their operational objectives and strategic goals. Leadership and management development company RedSky Learning has used the combined approach in organisations ranging from police forces and fire services to retailers, construction companies and financial services businesses.

### The challenge

A few years ago a small northern financial services company went through a rebranding exercise designed to give impetus to a new, more dynamic and customer-focused way of working. But although the rebranding signalled a real step change in the company's development, the board found it difficult to inject the pace required to deliver its ambitious new strategic objectives.

Alarmed by a persistent 'them and us' culture among executives and managers, as well as an entrenched silo mentality and high staff turnover, the company called in RedSky Learning. RedSky quickly diagnosed the problem as a top team that knew how to manage, but not lead. Their remedy was a tailored leadership programme, with the Margerison-McCann Linking Skills Profile at its heart, which has wrought a radical transformation in the company's health over the past two years.

### The solution

RedSky's programmes typically last between eight and ten months, spread out over a year, and comprise four

core workshops interspersed with four two-hour individual coaching sessions. The one- to two-day workshops focus on leading yourself, leading your business, leading high-performance teams and leading change. The coaching sessions draw from and build on what people learnt in the workshops.

The Linking Skills Profile – a 360-degree feedback tool – is a key component in RedSky Learning's programmes. Managing director Diane Coolican believes the Linking Skills Profile is most effective when used in conjunction with the Team Management Profile so in the first workshop managers receive their Team Management Profile to help determine and analyse their leadership style. In the follow-up one-to-one coaching session, the focus is on the manager's Linking Skills Profile.

Diane explains: "The two Profiles complement and reinforce each other. For example, you might emerge from the Linking Skills Profile as being very forceful. But if you then look at where you sit on the Team Management Wheel – you may be a Thruster-Organiser, for example – that puts it into context and helps you understand why some people perceive you the way they do. It depersonalises feedback.

"The results from both Profiles give people clarity about the areas they need to work on, and by the end of the first coaching session they have a personal development plan and action plan designed to help them meet the personal, team and business objectives identified in the programme," says Diane.

RedSky favours the Linking Skills Profile over other 360-degree feedback tools because it is highly specific and difficult to either misinterpret or interpret subjectively. It also breaks down feedback into a range of



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opinion, rather than simply bunching all the scores together, which can be misleading. “A low overall score in one area could be the result of just one person scoring you extremely low, so changing your behaviour on that basis could result in you upsetting six other people,” explains Diane.

The HR director of the financial services organisation agrees with Diane’s analysis: “The Linking Skills Profile was a great opportunity for us to take a good honest look at ourselves in a safe way, and it led to lots of soul-searching and conversations and feedback,” he says.

What’s more, the Linking Skills Profile is a great way to gauge individuals’ progress as they go through a programme. RedSky normally asks delegates to redo their Linking Skills Profile at the end, which typically shows “fantastic measurable differences,” says Diane – and doing the exercise half way through the programme too can reveal significant improvements.

Another important feature of RedSky leadership programmes is a real-life business improvement project. In the second workshop delegates are asked to identify a persistent problem in the business – absenteeism, inefficient stock delivery, failure to meet sales targets, and so on. The consultants arm them with techniques to develop some innovative solutions, and then charge them as a team with implementing the solution over the remaining six to eight months of the programme.

The programmes wind up with a presentation by the company team to the senior management – an exercise that allows participants to ‘sell themselves’ as candidates for new challenges as much as to communicate the return the business has made on its investment.

## The result

“Successfully implementing the solution – including delivering the estimated savings or additional revenue – will depend on putting into practice things learned in the workshops and coaching sessions. A typical project delivers around £500,000,” says Diane, “but one

team saved nearly £1.7 million. The understanding of themselves, of each other and of the overall team dynamics gained through the Team Management Profile and Linking Skills Profiles, are key to success.”

Two projects undertaken by teams at the financial services organisation netted around £300,000. “Embarking on the business project felt a bit alien,” admits one participant: “We were all busy with our day jobs, and although we all knew each other much better as a result of the programme, being forced to work together on a business project felt quite challenging. But the stronger relationships we forged as a result of working on that project made us much closer as a group – and that was a huge benefit in itself. Making so much money as a result was a real eye-opener about just what you can achieve by working together.”

The financial services HR director comments: “In the past several of us had done various different ‘team-building’ exercises, but while they felt like good bonding activities at the time, we tended to retreat into our own little boxes once we got back to the office. This leadership programme was different, because it happened over a period of several months, and we were applying it as a team in our day-to-day work as we went along. We’ve now got some very high quality people performing to their full potential, making us better placed than we have ever been to deliver our strategic plans and achieve our over-arching ambition of being the best customer-owned business.”

The approach RedSky took with this organisation is typical of the programmes they have been delivering over the past six years to help large and small organisations in the private, quoted and public sectors to achieve their operational goals and strategic objectives. Their experience from dealing with a range of clients is that many of them share common problems – including a ‘tell’ culture, poor delegation and poor communication. Using the TMS tools, RedSky can quickly help address such issues, and help embed new behaviours by means of sustained programmes, rather than one-off events.