

Bringing **teamwork** into focus



A major European acquisition, which added 1 500 employees, prompted global contact lens maker CooperVision to review its European manufacturing and logistics operation. The new management team is using the Team Management Profile throughout the business to foster the teamworking required to sustain its reputation for excellent customer service.

CooperVision has a long history and heritage in the manufacturing of contact lenses, and sells them to customers in over 100 countries. Headquartered in California, it turned over \$2.6 billion in 2017. The acquisition of UK rival Sauflon Pharmaceuticals in 2014, along with a large production facility in Budapest added over 1 500 employees. As a result, most of CooperVision's employees - over 5,000 of them - are now in Europe, and over half of these are in the UK. The European headquarters is in Fareham, Hampshire.

Despite its size, you could be forgiven if you've never heard of CooperVision as it's primary focus is business to business. With commitment to its customers bordering on the obsessive, it was essential to get the European operation right from the start so that it could continue to provide the exemplary service and support customers have come to expect and value.

The challenge

"Before 2014 everything was centralised in the UK, so we essentially had to build up the European manufacturing function from scratch," explains Willem Lammertink, Senior HR Director Manufacturing and Logistics Europe. "That meant looking at who we were, what role Europe played in the bigger CooperVision strategic plan, how our management team could best support our internal and external European customers (manufacturing has internal customers; distribution and sales external customers), what our individual sites and functions needed to do to help us achieve our strategic goals, and so on. We use a tool called VMOST, which stands for Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies and Tactics, to help us determine these things."

Since 2016 the Team Management Profile has played a critical role. The key was to establish

processes to help the business achieve its goals, as Willem explains. "Both the Senior Vice-President of Manufacturing and I had previously worked for Phillips, which is a highly process-oriented technology company, so we are both 'process thinkers'. He'd recently done the Team Management Profile and thought it would be an ideal tool to help us work out who we are and how we need to work together to achieve our goals."

The solution

When Willem received his own Profile he immediately saw its potential. "Not only does it tell you about your preferences as an individual; it also highlights the strengths of the team and 'development areas' where you need to pay attention. This is invaluable when you're planning projects, for example."

His advocacy of the Team Management Profile means it's been used in many teambuilding



sessions throughout the company, and this will continue, both with teams that haven't yet done it and in follow-up sessions with teams that have.

Amanda Harrison, a chartered occupational psychologist and TMSDI associate, has worked closely with Willem to deliver these sessions. "We ran the first teambuilding session in early 2016 for the European senior leaders - and, of course, everyone was so taken with the Team Management Profile that they wanted their own teams to experience it too," recalls Amanda. "They immediately got it. But that's not surprising: despite its rigorous underpinnings it's very visual, the language is easy to understand and it provides deep insights without getting bogged down in complex psychology."

Although people had completed their Profile Questionnaires in advance, Amanda saved their reports until a little later in the session. She started with an 'icebreaker' exercise around teambuilding and different ways of working, and then talked about the Team Management Profile and the concept of preferences. She then asked them to think about where they might be on the Team Management Wheel. Only at this point did she hand out the Profiles. "I build it up," she says. Typically she gives people 30-40 minutes to read their Profile in a break-out space. "And I'll wander round and have a chat: I've already seen their Profiles so I know what to talk to them about - for example, if they have a 'split Wheel' why that might be interesting. And they can talk to me more during the day or in a follow-up phone call."

Once people had had time to absorb their Profiles, Amanda helped them explore the implications for teamworking. "Everyone wrote on a flipchart their 'Linking tips' - the key things about themselves that they want others to bear in mind in order to get the best

out of them. That in itself was really valuable: colleagues said things like 'Oh yes, I can really see that in you' or 'I hadn't realised that'."

As well as highlighting people's work preferences, the Profile indicates individuals' preferences along four scales exploring how they prefer to relate to others (Extrovert-Introvert); gather & use information (Practical-Creative); make decisions (Analytical-Beliefs); and organise themselves & others (Structured-Flexible). Getting people to stand on a line according to where they fall on any one of these scales was similarly revealing.

“ the senior team have been such strong advocates of the Team Management Profile [it's] created real momentum within the business

"The Profile opens up channels of communication," says Willem. "Everything's on the table, very clear and open, there are no surprises." Amanda agrees: "People see it's ok to voice an opinion, to be different, because they can suddenly see how valuable diversity is. This allows them to talk about their frustrations, challenges, risks and so on in a much more constructive way than they've felt able to in the past. And a really great benefit is that quieter people, whose views may not surface in the commotion of corporate life, suddenly get a voice."

She continues: "People could really see how they could work together in a non-confrontational, open, transparent and positive way. There can be a little scepticism from some people at the start of the process, but by the time they do these exercises, that's evaporated."

Many of the European management team

who did the first teambuilding session wanted Amanda to do similar sessions with their teams, and she has since run sessions for many of the functional teams within the business - including distribution and logistics, European marketing, supply chain and Quality Assurance. Sometimes there have been two sessions in each function - one for the senior team and one for the wider team. The sessions are interspersed with one-to-one coaching.

"The fact that Willem and the senior team have been such strong advocates of the Team Management Profile has created real momentum within the business," says Amanda.

The results

Amanda continues: "With the CooperVision teams (as often with other teams), we share the Dynamic Team Map visuals with the team and ask them to consider what this means. When they see only the major roles, they'll say things like 'we don't have anyone on the west side of the Team Management Wheel', 'we don't enjoy research', 'we don't tend to focus on maintaining what we do and looking after our people'. However, when they then see the related roles too, they realise they may have all areas of the Wheel covered."

But Amanda always emphasises that the Profile measures preference, not ability. "This is really important," she says. "There may not be anyone in the team who has a natural preference for certain areas of the Wheel, but that doesn't mean they can't do them or that they lack skills in those areas. We can enjoy something and not be skilled in it, and we can be skilled in something but not enjoy it. So we use the Profiles to facilitate a discussion among the team about what the picture looks like for them - where are their strengths, how do they ensure the 'gaps' are covered, what currently happens to cover these gaps, what do they need to think about going forwards, what opportunities are there, and so on?"



The beauty of the Team Management Profile, says Willem, is that because it immediately gives people a better understanding of their own and colleague's work preferences and, therefore, valuable information about how to work together more constructively, they can apply it straight away in their jobs. "But we don't force teams to do it. We offer it to the business, but it's not mandatory: it's their team, so it's their decision. I simply point out what a good tool this is for providing insights into preferences, strengths and areas for development - and in a way that doesn't threaten people. And it's been embraced."

What's more, the Team Management Profile is an infinitely flexible tool, as Amanda points out. You can use it to explore different aspects of performance and thereby achieve specific goals.

Willem agrees. "Day two of the programmes we've been running uses the knowledge people have gained from their Profiles, and the associated exercises - essentially the 'who we are' part of what we are trying to do - to look at what we therefore need to do to support each other, and what mindset shifts we need, if we are to achieve our goals in three years' time. By the end of the two days we have a clear picture of what we need to do."

“ we use the Team Management Profile session to explore how best to work together - and communicate better with other functions - to ensure the right products are in the right place at the right time

And while the overarching goals may be clear, 'what we need to do' to achieve those goals can vary significantly from team to team. For example, the European marketing team wanted to clarify their roles, responsibilities and reporting lines and improve communications

among each other so that they could innovate better. The logistics team (which didn't even exist a year ago) did a programme with the commercial team ("because there's a strong connection between the two," says Willem), which was largely devoted to exploring strengths and areas for development. "We found a great deal to talk about. We want to move to a position where the processes are so well embedded that they are unaffected even by very good people leaving."

The Quality Assurance team had different challenges again. Dispersed across geographies, they needed help to work as an effective virtual team. Amanda says: "We looked at what team members wanted from the head of the team, how he could best support them, and how to build trust in the team when everyone is working in different places."

They've run a similar session for managers in the supply chain group. Willem says: "Over the years they've had difficulties aligning themselves with the manufacturing, distribution and sales strategy, with recruiting people and so on. The teambuilding work has helped to turn them into an established group, and we'll run a similar session with all 25 employees in supply chain." It's a critical group, he points out, given that it's the link between production and sales (distribution). "We use the Team Management Profile session to explore how best to work together - and communicate better with other functions - to ensure the right products are in the right place at the right time."

So while the sessions always start from the same place - the VMOST model - they have different objectives. These objectives are determined in advance after consultation with team leaders and members, and Amanda tailors her sessions accordingly.

She explains: "I have 'design calls' in advance of a session, where I discuss with Willem what he and the team want to achieve, how

that links with the business model, the key challenges in the team, how long we have, and this allows us to structure the day to ensure maximum value and outputs for the team."

Indeed, Willem says that the way Amanda links the Team Management Profile to the business strategy and individual team challenges is critical to the success of the sessions.

"The tool itself is great, but what's also great is the way Amanda links it to the business: she has strong business acumen and her role in all this is about much more than facilitating. If it was only about facilitating, I could do that."

“ We are definitely working better and more closely as a team, and we've got to this point quicker than we would have done otherwise

Amanda adds even more value by putting together a follow-up pack of material to reinforce the learning gained in the sessions, and to sustain the Profile thinking. The pack from the Quality Assurance session, for example, includes visuals of the team members' preferences (ie, their 'Team Maps'), personal Linking tips from all members, and additional themed outcomes such as how to build and maintain trust, team strengths and opportunities, and sustaining outcomes. She says: "You can keep using the Profile long after the teambuilding sessions. For example, you can put posters up around the office, or have pocket guides so that when you're going into a meeting with someone you can remind yourself how they like to be approached. We often suggest that teams work with marketing to put this together, because it really does consolidate learning by acting as an aide-memoire."

But the learning is also reinforced by regular follow-up sessions - as frequently as every two



CooperVision®
Live Brightly.™

Case Study

Team Management Profile

months in the manufacturing management team. "We might look at our progress against the objectives we set in the last session, or update our Team Map if we have a new team member," says Willem. Simply gathering teams together on awaydays provides a useful focus that sustains momentum, he adds. "Every time we follow up it helps to reinforce the alignment between what we're doing and thinking and how we're behaving, with what we need to do and achieve going forward."

The benefits

"Two years on the road," as Willem puts it, and "people are definitely working better within and between teams. The Team Management Profile is making a practical difference day-to-day because people are living and breathing the knowledge gained."

But while people understand each other better, some are quicker to apply their new knowledge than others, who have to think about it a bit longer, he adds. Some even

draw a picture to help them think about how to resolve issues.

"But communication, mutual understanding and acceptance have really improved. It's a big gain."

However, people don't refer to each other in terms of their preferences - Concluder-Producer, or Upholder-Maintainer, for example. "They just know who to go to for whatever they need and how to get the best out of them," says Willem. "Your Profile is a preference, not a stamp on your forehead - and that's one of the things I like about it."

Around 200 people have done the Team Management Profile so far, and further sessions are planned with one of the commercial teams and Business Solutions. And the functional leadership teams, on a European and site level, will definitely do it," says Willem.

And the Team Management Profile spans cultural boundaries. While most delegates

speak strong English, the availability of the Profile in many different languages ensures non-native English speakers don't miss any nuances in their individual and team Profiles.

“ your Profile is a preference, not a stamp on your forehead - and that's one of the things I like about it

CooperVision is committed to developing its teams. It's an innovative company, which embraces new ideas, and it understands that investing in its people not only helps it achieve its ambition of being 'a great place to work', but also helps it sustain its strong customer focus.

But while Willem does a great job advocating for the Team Management Profile, says Amanda, "at the end of the day it really sells itself."

Hells Bells

In some teambuilding sessions participants play a game that allows them to see how their preferences work in practice. Willem explains: "When we face a challenge, feel under pressure, have tight deadlines to meet, we tend to revert to type, stick within our comfort zones. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but what this game is intended to do is get people to recognise and utilise the preferences and skills that exist across the whole team, and use this insight to allocate tasks. For example, those who love detail focus on the detail tasks, those who enjoy gathering information will perform this role."

The game, 'Hells Bells', which is facilitated by teambuilding consultancy Blue Hat, centres on a 'good knight' rescuing a princess from a 'bad knight', with component tasks ranging from

making outfits for the characters, to assembling a jigsaw, to constructing a contraption made of interlocking cogs. Clues for solving the problem are buried in riddles on information sheets around the room. Willem and Amanda set up the initial sub-teams, using people's Team Management Profile preferences, in order to ensure a balance of preferences in each team. However, says Willem, as the morning progresses people start to realise that they need to collaborate and co-ordinate their tasks and work across different teams, as well as within their own teams, to achieve their overall objective, rather than simply focusing on their own bit of the puzzle.

"The exercise enables us to show the team just how their preferences play out in 'real life' and the impact these have on

their performance," says Willem. "It's also novel, great fun, and facilitated by an excellent group, with the appropriate level of theatrics and humour, adding up to a very memorable and positive experience for the whole team."

And, points out Amanda, a particularly interesting aspect of the exercise is seeing who takes up the role of central coordinator and speaks to the whole team about what's needed - "is it the established 'leader' in the group, or someone else, and how does this fit with their preferences?" - and how far through the exercise the team realise this central co-ordinator is required. She adds that "it all links really well into the Team Management Profile, which is about understanding tasks, working to preferences and linking."



Re-imagining how we work together

Further information: coopervision.co.uk | www.tmsdi.com

TMS Development International Ltd is an authorised distributor for Team Management Systems. © TMS Development International Ltd, 2018, 2022