

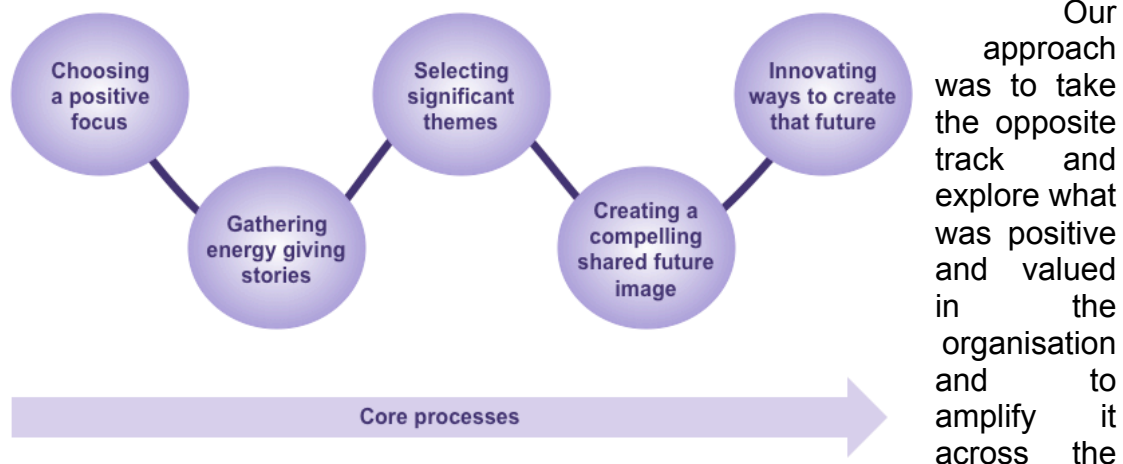
Shaping Culture Through Appreciation

The Situation

The UK production facility of a multi national chemical giant had developed an inflexible and unenthusiastic culture that had its roots in the 1960s. Successive waves of cost reduction, reorganisation and economic fluctuations had left a workforce that was disinterested and cynical. As a result production quality suffered and safety incidents, though none serious, were commonplace. Under threat of closure due to higher than average operating costs the Site Director faced the conflicting challenges of reducing costs while increasing employee engagement to improve quality.

Our Approach

This production facility, like countless others, had been used to driving improvements by reducing errors, faultfinding and problem solving. The same 'engineering mindset' had been applied to 'people issues' such as efficiency, sickness absence and flexible working. Whilst the norm in the majority of organisations today, the 'deficit' approach in human systems leads to predictable reductions in morale and an increase of silo working and finger pointing.



site.

Rather than asking what the organisation didn't want we asked what it *did* want. A 'productive, positive and effective organisation' became the place from which to start. We then invited a number of workers from across the site to form a group to begin work on co-creating an organisation they would be proud to be a part of.

After some initial training the team began collecting stories from around the site of where people had experienced positive behaviour from their colleagues. To the Site Director's surprise we discovered far more positive stories that he had ever imagined could exist. We ran workshops for the contributors and developed several significant themes that captured the



essence of a productive, positive and effective workforce and worked with them to create a compelling image of how a future that embodied those elements would look. Themes identified by the groups included Business Success, Personal Leadership, Teamwork, Learning, Change and Caring. These were developed into aspirational, positively worded statements that set the standard for future behaviour.

Groups of co-workers, led by one of the team were then asked how they could bring the imagined future to life in their part of the site. These sessions were designed to put pragmatic detail onto the aspirational themes. There was no reticence in coming forward and little evidence of cynicism among the groups. Together the teams generated scores of potential ideas, some pragmatic and some less so. The next job was to decide from the range of things that *could* be done, what *should* be done.

This involved representatives across the organisation, including the Site Director, meeting over a period of several shift patterns. Available resources were limited and it was crucial that any decisions were fully endorsed and supported by the organisation as a whole. The resulting commitments were the product of long and tough sessions where managers and workers engaged in 'real' conversations about the threats and opportunities from outside and what it was 'really' like within the site.

During this time we provided coaching to several key players in the management team to help them avoid falling into their old patterns of behaviour. This was the point of greatest leverage available to us in terms of shaping overall culture. Team coaching sessions were also provided for the management team as a whole so it could learn more effectively from the experience.

The Outcome

As a result of the initial work the organisation began to talk to itself outside of the confines of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee that had until then been the main information conduit between senior management and the workforce. Improvement teams were set up at local level to devise new ways of working that were in tune with the future vision, of which they had played a part in creating.

Changes and initiatives brought in flexibility in working practices that produced cost savings. Plant operatives worked with sales technicians to provide better after sales service and improved quality control. These successes were celebrated and encouraged both locally and site wide to reinforce the changes. Employees began to police the changes themselves, challenging 'old' behaviours and maintaining the new patterns.

At the same time an external company was engaged to provide maintenance services at a much-reduced cost. The same principals of looking for what works were used to integrate the two partnering organisations in a manner devoid of suspicion, turf defending and acrimony that so often accompanies joint venture working.