

Developing a shared leadership culture to support significant growth



The organisation

Xaar is a world leader in the development of digital inkjet technology and an award-winning manufacturer of piezoelectric drop-on-demand industrial inkjet printheads. Xaar's technology is used all over the world in a wide range of manufacturing applications. With over 250 patents filed since 1986, covering the areas of technological advancement, know-how and production processes, this ongoing commitment to innovation ensures Xaar remains a leader in bringing leading inkjet technology to a wide range of industries.

The business issues

Xaar has stretching business objectives for significant market growth. The recognition that they needed to develop a clear and shared cultural vision to help them achieve their targets led them to approach a number of possible development partners.

Cranfield was chosen to work in partnership with Xaar to undertake diagnostic work both in the UK and Sweden. The key business issues which the programme needed to address were identified and agreed as:

- The need to engage staff in the delivery of the business strategy
- Developing 'just enough' business processes and systems to support the implementation of the strategy but not to hinder the business
- Creating an appropriate set of shared values that would guide managerial practices and behaviours
- Ensuring management 'live' these values in the

form of consistent and appropriate set of practices that become Xaar's 'style' or 'way of doing things'.

- To lead, develop and measure culture development in support of the business strategy.

The approach

Cranfield worked with the executive team in order to achieve two broad aims: firstly, to explore, evaluate and agree the desired organisational culture of Xaar which would best serve the needs of the business in a sustainable way; and secondly, to reach agreement on the leadership style and behaviours which would be most effective in helping the company to move towards and maintain this desired culture. A key element of this would be identifying the Xaar values and the behaviours and practices which would indicate that the values were being lived.

It was important to recognise the growth and success enjoyed by Xaar. The programme needed to build on this and support the 'strategy and tactics' objectives set out in the existing business plan which the executive team had produced.

The programme

The programme included a number of development sessions, meetings and activities at different levels of the organisation and has taken place over 12 months. Key elements have been:

- Formal sessions, meetings and ongoing contact with the Executive Team
- Identifying Xaar's vision, values and behaviours to help move the organisation towards the desired future culture
- A conference to involve and engage team leaders in leading the culture change
- Project groups to support the creation of distributed leadership
- Creation of a 360 instrument using the vision, values and behaviours
- Ongoing coaching support.

The main formal event for the Executive Team focused on the following objectives:

- Reaching a shared view of the future culture of Xaar to support the delivery of the strategy
- Increasing self-awareness and awareness of colleagues to work more effectively as an executive team in order to lead the required changes
- Agreeing a shared approach to leadership in the Xaar context and identifying how individual and collective leadership behaviours and practices could be enhanced across teams in support of the required changes
- Identifying and setting up at least 2 project groups to work on selected priority issues currently facing the business and act as a vehicle for delivering the change
- Agreeing a clear plan of action emerging from the event which clearly specified actions, timescales and accountabilities.

Making a difference

"As we are building a company, we wanted to ensure that as we grew we built an appropriate culture which kept the dynamic environment of a small company but within a framework which was appropriate for a larger entity. We were also conscious of the fact that the management team had all been hired in from various companies over the past

few years, and of course brought with them values and behaviours from their previous employers. Hence the culture developed within Xaar could just be a 'mish-mash' of history and baggage.

This programme forced us to specify what it was we were striving to achieve, and start a process to put it in place. Just being made to specify where we were trying to get to and the values and behaviours required, was an excellent team building tool for a relatively new management team. Then cascading down through the staff ensured that least there was clarity on the type of culture that we were trying to generate. Small kick off projects have commenced to implement practical change, with a particular focus on making them real business activities, embedded in the realities of day to day business. We see this very much as a journey and not as a short term objective."

Ian Dinwoodie, CEO, Xaar Plc

Why Cranfield?

"Being a technology company with aggressive business goals and a management team made up mainly of engineers, we have an environment that doesn't easily lend itself to focus on the 'softer elements' of business.

Hence, for this to work, we needed a team with the credibility to work in this environment and make the subject very real and practical. After reviewing multiple offerings, with a specific desire to avoid 'one size fits all' off the shelf offering, we chose Cranfield on the basis of the people we met, their ability to understand what we were after, and their commitment to generating a customised and flexible programme based on our needs."

Ian Dinwoodie, CEO, Xaar Plc