



CASE STUDY

----- The Environment Agency -----

Creating the right culture and environment



The Environment Agency is the nondepartmental public body answerable to the UK Parliament and responsible for protecting and enhancing the

environment. Employing over 11,000 people it is divided into eight directorates/divisions.

The Challenge

When Phil Winrow took over as Head of Business Finance, at the Environment Agency (EA) in 2008, he knew immediately that something needing to be done about culture; things weren't working as well as they could do. "We had a legacy," he explains. "Whenever you come in you've got a set of people who do things their own way, who can't see there is a wider impact." Three years later, his department was surveyed by Ipsos MORI, who found employee satisfaction one of the highest it had ever seen. That's quite a turnaround.

The task facing Phil in 2008 is a familiar one. "We had people in there who were brilliant with a set of figures but not so great with other people. Leave them alone with a spreadsheet and they're happy. But ask them to talk about their feelings or get them to ask other people about their feelings..." he trails off. Phil tried a few of the fixes available in-house. **"We tried workshops, we tried calling everybody a customer, we did all sorts of things to try and change the culture. But if you haven't got to the heart of the problem, you can't succeed."**

Innes Garden (having been with the EA since 1995) was one of the people at the other end when Phil Winrow arrived. "Things did need improving," he remembers.

"People were coming at things from their own understanding of the situation, which isn't the whole picture, and it led to other people being frustrated at not being heard."

The Solution

It was at this point that Phil decided to introduce BP2W. "I knew An Even Better Place to Work from before and had been impressed. What appealed to me about it was the way that people engaged with it. It wasn't the sort of system where people performed a series of tasks, got a certificate and then got back to doing things the way they did them before. ***Because of the way BP2W engaged with people, it got to the heart of the situation.***"

Not everyone loves change, however, and when Phil suggested that the way work was done could do with a tweak, heels were dug in. "Yes, there was initially some resistance," says Phil. Innes Garden agrees, but adds, "Once the team saw what An Even Better Place to Work was, they took an 'OK, let's try it' attitude; they were fairly open and willing."

The reason for this openness is understood by anyone who has used BP2W. This on-line, self-managed program is designed to create more openness, trust and collaboration, "First of all," says Innes, "it's not threatening. Second, it's fun." He elaborates, "It's all about your views, your feelings. It expresses everything in terms of personal needs. And it's all about solutions, it's offbeat, people enjoy doing it."

"At first it's all a bit of fun, quite lighthearted," says Phil. "It's not initially challenging. But as time goes on ***it lays down a challenge, and people rise to it. Its core strength is that it challenges assumptions – our own, those we hold about others*** – and gets us to appreciate the other point of view. It's all about talking, and that's a really important component of the business, talking."