

Project Management / Microsoft Project Training

In the summer of 2002 we provided a customised series of Project Management and Microsoft Project training events for the Sales and Marketing team within Bentley Motors Ltd.



Background

There can be few more evocative names in the annals of the automotive (and motor sports) industries than Bentley. Founded by W.O. Bentley, Bentley Motors saw spectacular racing successes in the twenties and thirties. The names of the Bentley Boys and their contribution to the victories at Le Mans are still legendary. Success in motor sport influenced commercial success with the marque becoming synonymous with luxury, performance, quality and craftsmanship. However, time has marched on and with the twenty first century upon us a new Bentley is beginning to reinvent itself.

Already the company is no stranger to change, having been acquired by Rolls- Royce in the thirties and in 1998 acquired by the Volkswagen Group. Now trading as Bentley Motors once more, Bentley is preparing to enter another important chapter in its history.



"We are undergoing a huge period of change, both internally, here on-site; outside with our network of dealers and obviously for our own customers" comments Ed Striebig, formerly launch planning manager for the business.

"The split of Rolls-Royce & Bentley, preceded by the change of ownership to become a wholly owned subsidiary of Volkswagen AG, have been the catalyst and the means by which we've been able to express our ambitions which we've harboured for a long time of growing the business and growing it quite considerably. The change is not just in the ownership but also in what we are able to achieve and the new targets we are able to set ourselves realistically as a business."

Requirement

So how does an organisation such as Bentley approach a review of its systems and processes, and more importantly identify the areas for change? A decision was taken to establish a dedicated team of three people to focus on business improvement. The important factor here was the ability to take people out of their day-to-day roles and as Ed states "focus them very clearly on the future of the company." This approach allowed the team to take an independent view of the organisation to examine the future plans of Bentley and to match them to the requirements: "whether they are systems, processes or people."

It was as part of this team that Ed began to look at the management and coordination of activities, the allocation of resources and more critically the allocation of funding for such initiatives. This was to lead to a review of the way that Bentley managed its sales and marketing projects. The business process improvement team started to look at the previous shortcomings in project planning and at ways to address those issues.

In January 2002, the team focused on theoretical approaches to the processes, techniques and skills involved in successful project management.

Realising at this stage that the desired solution was a much larger task than had been initially envisaged, Bentley sought expert help and appointed Project Learning Limited (PL) to provide guidance on how to successfully adopt and implement current project management techniques and support tools.

The importance of obtaining a solution was underlined by the nature and scope of the project that had to be managed. With the new Bentley Motors would emerge a new family of vehicles – most especially the launch of the Bentley Continental GT, a project of paramount importance to the business.

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Consultation and contract award

Following detailed consultation, PL proposed a way forward as Ed Striebig explains: "The way in which it had been put across to me made sense, and I felt it important that those arguments be put across to my manager, we were mid project, there was an immediate need to improve and the expectation was to bring an immediate solution."

The meeting provided an exploration of the appropriate solution for Bentley's requirements and the match with the products offered by PL. A tender was subsequently created detailing the scope of the requirement. However, before this could be issued to potential suppliers the requirement for project management training had to be approved by the company's internal training team. Having achieved sign off, the specification could then be issued.

A formal proposal was submitted by PL detailing the training recommendations proposed delegate numbers and tentative dates. Following a benchmarking exercise, against other project management training suppliers PL were awarded the contract.

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Fact finding and course customisation

The first element of the delivery was to be a fact finding day which was to put in context what it was we were trying to achieve and what were our specific objectives for engaging in an education process around project management and Microsoft Project. Also important to Bentley was the inclusion of the delegates and their "personal objectives and personal needs".

The fact-finding day was to provide both parties with an understanding of the individual's backgrounds, existing skills and more importantly, the culture within which the newly learned skills were to be deployed. The format chosen for this day was to be an open, 'round table' discussion, the proposed tutor from PL and some of the prospective delegates. For continuity a single tutor would be assigned to the entire contract, in this case Diane Gosling, partner at PL. Attending the fact-finding day was to be of great benefit to Diane "Without doubt, the fact finding day offered us the opportunity to really get under the skin of Bentley, its people and its culture. I was able to establish a rapport with key personnel and with a number of the delegates – this helped to provide an informal relaxed learning environment when the training was subsequently conducted."



The next requirement was the customisation of the course material itself. With the knowledge gained in the pre-delivery consultation, Diane and Ed set to work to modify the existing structures for both the project management and Microsoft Project courses.

"We agreed very early on that the content of both courses would need to be tailored to meet specific needs at Bentley. We had some very clear objectives, and we wanted to emphasise certain elements of the course content," stated Ed.

Diane's input here was also extremely useful: "We were able to introduce elements to the courses that would provide the delegates with the maximum interaction whilst ensuring that the knowledge gained was appropriate and focused." The flexibility of Project Learning as training provider in this tailoring was to prove of great importance, as was their flexibility in delivering the courses.

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Delivery

Finally the establishment of a delivery schedule was required. No small task when you are co-ordinating thirty people's diaries for a total of 4 days training each. Bentley had initially established that it required two courses for project management theory and two courses for Microsoft Project, each to be a two-day duration event. A time buffer also had to be built in, between the project management and software courses to allow every delegate's time to absorb the new information. The result, by virtue of the logistics of coordinating such events was somewhat different, and for Bentley the flexibility of the training provider was paramount "both on the timing and the content of the courses." PL finally concluded the training in July 2002 having delivered six events equally split between project management theory and Microsoft Project training. The fact finding day, training and a post training surgery, were conducted at the Bentley's Crewe factory utilising the company's own training facility.



The conclusion to the exercise was for Diane to spend a day at Crewe closing off the delivery when a senior management briefing was prepared. Additionally, the opportunity was taken to create some template plans which the sales and marketing team could use as a blueprint for their planning processes. This also gave Ed and Diane a chance to assess the project; "the feedback for the whole exercise and more specifically to the training that people undertook, has been consistently positive," comments Ed.

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Outcome

The exercise provided a ground up reassessment of the way Bentley Motors sales and marketing team's processes operated. For the future new questions are now being raised and opportunities to extend these ideas are being explored. In Ed's view, the positive contribution of PL was a key factor in the success of the training events; "from the first point of contact on the level of consultation was first class and gave me a great degree of confidence".

Ed also appreciated how involved PL became with the project "PL's enthusiasm to genuinely help us make the most out of this, the effort taken to understand as fully as they could the context that the training was being delivered in, the current business situation, our future plans and the individual issues faced by the delegates was very impressive".

He concludes: "the most impressive element was their knowledge of the subject matter, in all probability a function of their specialisation and concentration on project management, rather than being everything to all men at all times".

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