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BUILDING PROJECT MANAGEMENT CAPACITY WITHIN A CHANGING

When the University of Law restructured to form a charitable foundation and a limited company, gaps were revealed in management processes and project management methodology. So the organisation decided to seek expert guidance. Jon Formby, Senior Development Partner at the University of Law Ltd, explains why Wellingtone was the ideal choice to provide a structured approach in training staff – an approach that then was adapted to meet expectations created through a subsequent buyout by private equity firm Montagu Equity.

The Scenario: Equipping the Organisation with Competitive Education

The University of Law is the UK's longest-established specialist provider of legal education. "About 18 months ago our Governors decided that our structure didn't equip us to compete with some of the newer education offerings in the market," Jon recalls. "So we split our organisational structure to create a charitable foundation - The Legal Education Foundation - alongside the University of Law Ltd. As soon as we became a limited company we were bought out by a private equity firm looking to kick off a number of Future Potential Plan (FPP) projects with immediate effect."

The Challenge: Introducing the Methodology in a Flexible Way

An analysis of the management structure showed that there was a lack of understanding and knowledge about project management. "We had one or two people on board who, since joining us, had completed the PRINCEII qualification, but essentially there was no kind of structured methodology around what we were doing," says Jon. "There were lots of meetings but not much planning or structure to support the ideas. We needed our people to at least understand the basics of sound project management techniques."

The University of Law Ltd had previously come into contact with Wellingtone, and so the timing seemed ideal to explore the company's services and training techniques further. "I went along and participated in one of Wellingtone's one day courses to get a first-hand feel for his training

techniques," explains Formby. "I was quite new to project management so it was useful for me to experience how he introduced those concepts, given that my own lack of experience matched the situation of most of our staff." Happy with Wellingtone's approachable style, a consultation was conducted and a training programme was agreed. "It was a two-step programme. Ideally we wanted people to participate in the full two days of training, but they also had the flexibility to pursue the first day only" Jon explains. "The main priority was to give our middle management tier training in an accessible and adaptable way."





The Crucial Issue: Adapting to Unexpected Developments

The initial training programme delivered by Wellingtone ran concurrently with Montagu Equity's buyout, changing the organisational landscape considerably. "They wanted to kick off a number of FPP (Future Potential Plan) projects as soon as they came in, which meant we suddenly had a lot more people coming to us having been asked to run a project and not feeling they had the skills" says Jon. "So we established a more intensive one-day course covering not only the basics but how to manage an FPP plan. The majority of our participants really embraced the course. They know that they needed to develop their capacity in the face of the new buyout."

The Outcome: Ensuring a Smooth Transition

Wellingtone's skills, experience and flexible delivery ensured a smooth transition and helped the University of Law Ltd to bridge any gaps between capability and expectation. "If we hadn't had Wellingtone it would have been a much bigger leap to make, not just in terms of project members and project owners but in terms of the entire team. There could potentially have been a significant mismatch between our buyer's focus on FPP projects and our people's lack of experience. Wellingtone really helped us to get over that particular hurdle."

The outcome has had encouraging results for the University of Law Ltd, with a boost in confidence for staff handling projects. "We're much more geared up now to deliver the equity firm's 3-5 year FPP business plan" Jon confirms. "If we hadn't been able to do that we would have really struggled in today's environment."

The Lessons Learned: The Importance of Empathising with your Audience

It was important for the University of Law Ltd that the training was carried out in a particular style that would achieve positive results.

"We felt that in this new area, where people were feeling anxious about the implications of moving to a project management model, Wellingtone's approachability and

supportive attitude really got a positive reaction from people" says Jon. "He reassured them with a step-by-step approach which worked very well. The subject can be quite dry and full of jargon, but Wellingtone cuts through that and breaks it down into human terms that people can easily get enthusiastic about."

The Bottom Line: An Ongoing Partnership

Such was the success of the initial training programme that Wellingtone seems set to be a part of the University of Law's developmental landscape in the future, according to Jon. "We're hoping to work with Wellingtone again and explore what they call project management mentoring, with a view to bringing them back in to support a number of people

involved in the bigger projects who are fairly new to the discipline. As an aside we're also looking at developing more technical skills including Microsoft Project and how to use that effectively. We'll also continue to use him to deliver initial training to new people coming in."

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