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Dispute resolution in the music industry

PolyGram

Joanne Balenzano

'The aim was to develop a Conflict Management System (CMS) to resolve conflict within the organisation, the objective was to have a CMS in place that was simple to use, user-friendly and designed by staff, to ensure ownership of the CMS.'

PolyGram is involved in the music industry with classics, jazz and contemporary labels as well as a film division and distribution chain. We developed an internal system to deal with conflict within our workforce. The aim was to develop a Conflict Management System (CMS) to resolve conflict within the organisation. The objective was to have a CMS in place that was simple to use, user-friendly and designed by staff, to ensure ownership of the CMS.

Senior management, president and managing director, music operations and legal and business affairs director were closely involved in the project.

The perceived benefits in designing a CMS were many. PolyGram wanted a formal procedure in place that staff would feel comfortable using. We hoped to resolve issues before they got 'out of hand' to enable us to avoid unnecessary staff resignations and/or legal action in extreme cases. To involve all staff in the setting up of the CMS, they completed questionnaires and voted for contact officers. The selection of contact officers was accomplished by staff nominations. This was to ensure staff would feel 'comfortable' approaching at least one of the trained contact officers. The ultimate aim was that PolyGram would be able to resolve issues in-house.

A focus group was established to ensure communication of the process and to help in the CMS development. Members of the group were representative of all divisions within the company. Each focus group member was required to filter and communicate information through to the staff in their division.

The unexpected benefit of the development of a CMS was the support, interest and eagerness of the focus group. The whole process was an excellent example of teamwork at its best.

The members of the focus group were very 'in tune' with the process followed in the CMS design and motivated to make it a success.

Some of the staff not directly involved in the development process may have been a bit cynical about the project. As time went on, this

cynicism became less obvious. The focus group members assisted in overcoming any resistance to the process by explaining to staff, in detail, what we were trying to accomplish. Having a variety of staff from different levels in the company in the focus group meant increased acceptance of the process by staff in general. This avoided the perception of a process created by senior management without employee input.

The process was formalised with the assistance of an outside consultant, who provided a template for us to follow. The CMS was customised to suit the needs of our company and the culture of PolyGram. This culture can best be described as casual, informal and an extremely hard working environment.

The timetable initially established for design and implementation of the CMS was missed significantly. In hindsight, this is not seen as detrimental to the ultimate launch of the CMS.

The legal and human resources departments, the managers of each department having ultimate responsibility for the success, initiated the project.

Training on the CMS process was provided to the elected contact officers and the managers of legal and business affairs and human resources. The managers of the two departments were also trained in mediation.

The CMS was launched to staff at an informal luncheon. Speakers included PolyGram's managing director, music operations and the outside consultant.

Some of the challenges we faced were meeting the deadlines and converting the cynical staff members. The general co-ordination of the process was also challenging.

One success of the CMS design process was the teamwork of the focus group and their willingness to contribute to the process. Another success was the implementation of a CMS that was tailor-made by us, for us. Seeing the CMS work and the success of the process is a great reward. ♦

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