

Generating Powerful Solutions

TRANSALTA USES SKILLFUL FACILITATION TO DRIVE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENTS AND SAVE MONEY

SITUATION

TransAlta, one of Canada’s largest non-regulated power generation and wholesale marketing companies, was shifting its strategic focus to respond to a deregulated marketplace and increased competitive pressures.

According to Lyall Samaroden, Senior HR Advisor, “We’re moving from being driven by operational excellence only, to an environment where we’re counting our nickels and dimes, and generating revenue, while maintaining our operations focus.”

According to Bob Dick, Director of Business Transformation, “Our CEO and President, Steve Snyder, asked us to design and implement an employee involvement program.

‘PowerUp’ is a grass-roots process that involves people rallying to identify a work issue, working together to solve it, and then implementing the solutions they’ve come up with.”



“It became apparent that facilitation of these ‘PowerUp’ sessions was going to be essential. We had a history of asking people’s opinions, but not following through properly. We saw that facilitation competence was one of our critical success factors.”

SOLUTION

TransAlta turned to Interaction Associates, Inc. to develop the needed facilitation competency. In December 2002, 18 TransAlta employees completed *Essential Facilitation*® training.

Samaroden says, “We pulled together business transformation, HR, and our Alberta thermal facility transformation team. This Interaction Associates workshop was a key turning point in helping people realize what a program like ‘PowerUp’ could do for the

vital statistics

- Close to \$9 billion in energy assets
- Nearly 2,500 employees
- 49 power plants in Canada, the U.S., Mexico, and Australia

Interaction Associates IA is a 40-year firm specializing in the development of Facilitative Leaders. We equip these leaders to solve complex problems and achieve extra ordinary results by leveraging the power of people working together. Since 1969, we have partnered with global leaders across all industries, and many of the Fortune 100, to transform the way people lead, and are led, at every level in an organization.

case study

business. Even though I helped create the program, and I already was convinced that the tools we had put in place would lead to success, seeing the effectiveness of good facilitation was extremely motivating. The light bulb went on! We saw how to walk someone through facilitated brainstorming, come up with a series of possible solutions, narrow those, build an action plan, and motivate people to take action.”

RETURN ON INVOLVEMENT

Over the course of 2003, TransAlta conducted 20 successful “PowerUp” implementations across the organization. These began immediately following the facilitation training, and included sites in Alberta, Ontario, and Washington State.

“We realized significant financial returns,” Samaroden reports. For example, a facilitated “PowerUp” session at the Alberta Thermal Plant led to significant improvement in the time it takes to conduct forced outages, when equipment is taken offline for maintenance. Samaroden says, “They shaved a number of hours, significantly reducing the duration of historically similar outages. Over the year, this equates to \$353,000 annual savings to the organization.” In addition, the Centralia, WA plant used a facilitated “PowerUp” session to address an existing safety issue and rectified a potentially hazardous situation.

Bob Dick says, “We set goals for two things: successful ideas implemented, and number of people involved. There was some pressure to set a dollar savings target, but I felt the fundamental achievement in the first year would be implementing ideas and getting people engaged.”

“We have had 20 ‘PowerUps’ successfully implemented, with three still in progress, involving 210 distinct employees in the sessions,” says Samaroden. “Overall, we’ve seen increased amount of engagement in the organization, with employees taking on new accountabilities, problem solving, and recommending solutions to business issues.”