



CASE STUDY

Coca-Cola Great Britain

CASE STUDY:

Building an Agile, High-Performance Team of Diverse Thinkers

HOW COCA-COLA GREAT BRITAIN DEVELOPED THE COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION SKILLS TO MANAGE THE LOGISTICAL FEAT OF A 1,000-CITY TORCH RELAY.



OBJECTIVE:

To build high-performance teams capable of communicating and collaborating effectively to manage the logistics of the 70-day, 8,000+ miles Olympic Torch Relay.

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In the Olympic Torch Relay, a small torch, lit from the previous host country's Olympic flame, is relayed, hand to hand, by torchbearers across the world to the new host nation. Coca-Cola has been involved with the Olympic Torch Relay since the Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games, helping to build the excitement across the globe before the biggest celebration of international sport, and connecting people with the wonder and magic of the Olympic spirit.

For London 2012, Coca-Cola Great Britain set out to engage the public in the journey of the Olympic flame through a series of fun, innovative and exciting initiatives. The company recognized the logistical challenges involved with the Games would require a high-performing team with excellent communication and collaboration skills, along with the agility and perspectives to handle the variety of tasks, issues and challenges that could come up at any given moment.

With a goal of inspiring change, participation and legacy, Coca-Cola Great Britain realized the Olympics also presented the company with the ideal opportunity to put a framework in place for quickly getting everyone in the organization working together successfully, both during the Games and after.



CHALLENGES:

To provide the skills and tools to enable a diverse, rapidly growing team to come together in a short timeframe and flawlessly execute on a highly complex initiative.

Seventy days, 8,000-plus miles, 1,000 towns, and one momentous flame.

Preparing for what was dubbed the “logistical minefield” of the 2012 Olympic Torch Relay was its own Olympian feat for organizers and sponsors. As each of the 8,000 people carrying the torch throughout the UK were accompanied by a convoy of media, staff, security and sponsors, the complexity of the task required flawless communications, dynamic agility and a gold-medal-worthy team showing.

And that was only part of the story.

As a Worldwide Partner of the London Games, Coca-Cola would also be hosting 61 free evening events up and down the country, four city celebrations, a Torch Relay finale bash with an audience of 80,000, and a wide range of sponsorship activities to bring the magic of London 2012 to every corner of the UK.

Adding to the complexity of the challenge, according to David Barker, Strategic HR Business Partner for Coca-Cola’s London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games project teams, the teams working on the Olympics were brought together from various parts of the business, including outside contractors and agencies. They had grown organically, starting small and expanding rapidly. Establishing a baseline—a common understanding for moving forward together—would be essential to making sure everyone could communicate, collaborate and function at world-class levels.

In the race to get ready, there would be no time to spare.

“The Olympics is our single biggest asset, so it’s absolutely vital we get it right,” says Joel Morris, Communications Director, Coca-Cola Great Britain and Ireland.



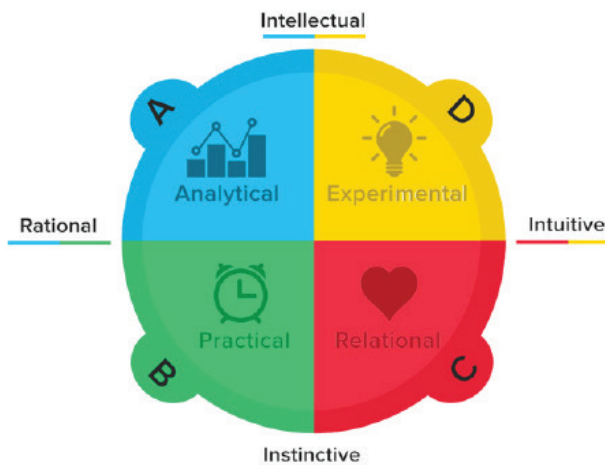
SOLUTION:

Using Whole Brain® Thinking as the foundation for Games preparation to develop self-awareness, establish a common language and build more mentally balanced groups for optimum collaboration and execution.

“There are lots of self-discovery and team discovery tools out there, but the Whole Brain® approach is really different. It balances a simple and easy-to-understand structure with a richness and depth that really help you understand your own default mindset, and also that of the people you work with.”

– James Eadie, Olympics Portfolio Director

Globally, Coca-Cola had a successful track record using Herrmann International's Whole Brain® Thinking approach and the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® (HBDI®) as a unifying framework and system for achieving better results in a variety of business areas and applications. With the Olympic involvement and other business changes occurring, the company felt the timing was right to bring it to the UK, particularly in light of the complexities involved with the Olympic sponsorship.



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A little over a year before the Games began, the company initiated a “test” rollout of Whole Brain® Thinking and the HBDI® in the UK with 12 people at the leadership level. The goal of the test was to see if this was a framework they could (1) embed, (2) sustain and (3) then apply across other functions.

According to Barker, the answers to all three were a resounding yes.

“Unlike some other tools, Whole Brain® Thinking is something you can apply to any situation—a project, project teams, a problem or issue—and it gives you a neutral baseline and common ground to start with. It’s such an easy process for people to take on board and connect with.”

From this test and the ensuing implementation, they made several key discoveries that reinforced the value of using the Whole Brain® framework as a foundation for preparing for the Games:

- The process itself helps people become more self aware and understanding of their thinking preferences, which is essential, Barker says, because if you understand yourself you can connect more effectively with others.
- Whole Brain® Thinking would play a key role in their efforts to build what they called a “high-performance team” for the Olympics, first by giving the diverse team members from both inside and outside the organization a common language. In fact, the language is part of the culture now. “You hear it being used all the time,” Barker says.

- The methodology would help them build more balanced groups and teams, both intentionally and on-the-fly, so they could collaborate and execute faster and more effectively. Armed with an understanding of the role thinking preferences play on results, and using the data and insights gleaned from the HBDI® Profiles, people could quickly determine gaps in thinking preferences and identify resources they needed to bring in to balance the group's thinking for better results.
- The methodology and easy-to-apply tools would quickly improve communications across the entire team. "We saw it was something people could easily apply to more quickly and effectively communicate once the team expanded out into venues and the Torch Relay," says Barker. "It ensures you articulate effectively and are understood quickly." Both would be critical once the Games were underway.

Adds James Eadie, Olympics Portfolio Director, "There are lots of self-discovery and team discovery tools out there, but the Whole Brain® approach is really different. It balances a simple and easy-to-understand structure with a richness and depth that really help you understand your own default mindset, and also that of the people you work with."



The Relay Team in Training

"We wanted to give them practical experience on how to quickly and effectively articulate and make sure they're being understood. We got great feedback from the participants. They appreciated that it has such practical application."

– David Barker, Strategic HR Business Partner for Coca-Cola's London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games project teams

From music agency liaison officers and event coordinators to convoy team specialists and PR/communications professionals, the Olympic Torch Relay team was comprised of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and included both permanent employees from across the business and external contractors and agency representatives.

Whole Brain® Thinking would serve a key role in unifying these disparate team members and preparing them to work together for flawless execution.

Barker says the first goal was to focus on self-awareness and the individual's own thinking preferences. Team members received their HBDI® Profiles and explored how thinking preferences influence their communications, behaviors and personal performance, as well as the role thinking preferences play in achieving overall results.

Next, they participated in pair exercises that Barker equates to a “speed dating” experience: People sat in chairs facing each other and debriefed each others’ profiles.

“Because this was a new team, it was a really effective way for them to get to know each other quickly and learn how to communicate with people based on their own and the other person’s preferences,” he says.

Another key component of the preparations was scenario planning, using the Whole Brain® Communicator process. The team went through a series of hypothetical exercises of potential situations that could occur during the relay and practiced using Whole Brain® Thinking techniques and tools to communicate with each other. They learned to “walk around” the thinking quadrants of the Whole Brain® Model to provide a complete picture of the situation in a way that would quickly translate the scenario into actions to address it: What’s the situation? Who are we communicating to? What do they need to know? What could happen next?

“We wanted to give them practical experience on how to quickly and effectively articulate and make sure they’re being understood,” Barker says. “We got great feedback from the participants on this exercise. They appreciated that it has such practical application.”

RESULTS:

“Gold-level” execution at the Games, with ongoing impact in the day-to-day culture, giving teams the self-awareness and skills to perform better under pressure.

“Whole Brain® Thinking has given us not just a theoretical model but something that is easy and quick to apply. There are so many different and practical ways to use it.”

– David Barker, Strategic HR Business Partner for Coca-Cola’s London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games project teams

Once the 2012 Games became part of Olympic and Paralympic history, the reflections and analyses began. The Holmes Report, a PR business and consulting report, said Coca-Cola has earned its place at the gold level of the podium:

Coca-Cola, who basically wrote the book on sponsorship activation, did it again through a multi-faceted campaign that included an original “Beat TV” entertainment series and Olympic Torch Relay sponsorship.

For those involved on the ground, it was a whirlwind. The run-up to the London Games progressed at a particularly rapid pace, even in a business environment that has become more hectic every day. But Barker sees tremendous value in the front-end time investment in Whole Brain® Thinking.

“Time has been a premium on this project, so taking time out of the day to spend on yourself doesn’t seem like a good investment in the short term,” he told us. “But it adds so much value in the long term. Whole Brain® Thinking has given us not just a theoretical model but something that is easy and quick to apply. There are so many different and practical ways to use it.”



While the Olympic teams are disbanding after the Games, the impact and ongoing application of Whole Brain® Thinking lives on at Coca-Cola.

“We did the training as the Olympics leadership team and it has now become a key currency we are all comfortable with,” Eadie says. “One of the most useful aspects is that it helps a team perform better under pressure. When the heat is on it gives you an awareness of how people, including yourself, behave.”

Barker says he is actually ahead of the core business because of the work with the Olympic teams, but the Whole Brain® framework will be embedded into the core business going forward.

“For those who will be redeployed, this will be so useful in their next role, either as an individual contributor or leader,” he says. “It will become the currency of the business.”

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