



CASE STUDY



CASE STUDY:

Increasing Employee Engagement and Customer Loyalty

How Integ Built a Culture of Engagement by Keeping Thinking Top of Mind



OBJECTIVE:

To increase employee engagement and strengthen customer loyalty.

IT company Integ provides secure communication and data networking solutions to organizations across Australia. In July 2011 Integ Group merged with UXC Connect and XSI Data to form one IT infrastructure company, adopting the UXC Connect name.

Each year the company revisits its annual business plan and company focus, defining the strategy, objectives and themes for the year and then presenting them to the employees. As it began this process in 2009, the company recognized that, with the market somewhat stagnant, there was a huge emphasis on “the return to customer focus,” says Integ’s CEO Ian Poole. Strengthening customer loyalty would be key to the business’s success, particularly with the market in a low-growth phase.

Additionally, while employee satisfaction was high and the vast majority of employees said they were proud to work at Integ, many said they were dissatisfied with the rewards and recognition programs in place. Cross-functional communication and collaboration issues were another area needing improvement.

As a result, Integ’s key objectives for the year were defined to include “customer focus” and “engaged culture,” with Poole noting that the engaged employee is something the company recognized it clearly needed to place stronger emphasis on.



CHALLENGES:

To create a more engaged, interpersonally focused culture among a staff of highly analytical engineers and IT professionals.

Integ has a large staff of engineers and highly skilled IT professionals who tend to be very logical and analytical in their approach to the job. While these qualities served them well in their technical roles, they could also create communication barriers when customer and cross-functional interactions were required. “Putting themselves in the customer’s shoes” wasn’t necessarily something that came naturally to these team members, but it would be essential for building a stronger customer focus and creating deeper customer ties.

“In our marketplace, we have to be able to align ourselves to our customers’ needs. We spend a lot of time understanding what their business requirements are and making sure our solutions are a best fit for them,” says Poole.

Integ had also completed an employee survey prior to setting the business plan. The results showed satisfaction among employees was high—around 87% were proud to work for the company—but employees were dissatisfied in the areas of reward and recognition and the level of communication between teams.

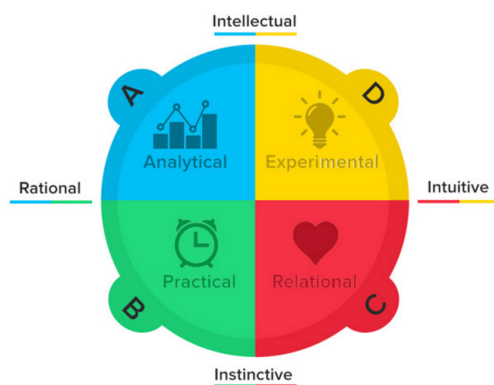
“They told us we communicate well within our own working groups, but when we start to work across functional boundaries, such as from sales to engineering or service to finance, we have difficulties,” Poole says.

The company believed that both the customer and employee communication issues had common roots and that a comprehensive, cohesive solution would be the best way to address them and achieve their overall goals for the year.



SOLUTION:

The HBDI® and Whole Brain® Model provided the company with an “organizing principle” that allowed each individual to look at others through the lens of thinking and understand their thinking and its impact on how they behave. Staff were given the tools to leverage their natural preferences and then learned how to apply the skill of Whole Brain® Thinking to adapt their thinking and operate outside their preferences when necessary.



The four-color, four-quadrant graphic and Whole Brain® are registered trademarks of Herrmann Global, LLC. © 2015 Herrmann Global, LLC

Figure 1: The Herrmann Whole Brain Model

The implementation followed a series of steps, with the final goal being self-taught cultural change for the organization. The program began with individual awareness through the HBDI®, followed by application tied to the organization’s goals of increased employee engagement and customer focus.

An integral component of application is the adoption of Whole Brain® Thinking within the organization so that the culture becomes embedded in the company. Integ worked to reach this step by reinforcing Whole Brain® Thinking in both serious and fun ways. One of those fun ways was the Integ Gets Red Program.

Integ Gets Red

It was no surprise that with its team of engineers and highly skilled IT staff, the majority of the Integ's staff were dominant in blue/A-quadrant thinking preferences. They pursued analytics and logic to tackle a job but weren't as comfortable with red/C-quadrant thinking, which focuses on communication and interpersonal skills. In essence, the C quadrant represented a "mental blind spot" for them.

As a result, the company launched a number of initiatives to complement the HBDI® results and reinforce the importance of engagement as a cultural foundation, with the Integ Gets Red Program a key component of this effort. Designed to "build up" the red quadrant and keep Whole Brain® Thinking top of mind, the program includes a variety of visual aids and reminders, including awards, red hats and red cards, which are given out as a kind of "pat on the back" for thinking like a customer or effectively engaging others.

Poole says there are lots of red cards floating around the office, noting that the people who present these cards often have opposite thinking preferences from the person they're giving them to. "It's real engagement, and you can see a lot of fun and excitement across the business."

Kerry Scotland, Integ's Marketing Director, says the Integ Gets Red Program has not only provided a fun way to focus on interpersonal skills, it's also strengthened the ability to engage customers and teams, particularly those who might think differently, by understanding where they're "coming from" and flexing to more C-quadrant thinking and approaches. Overall, it's been an effective way to take application to the next level and make Whole Brain® Thinking part of the day-to-day culture at Integ.



Integ Gets Red has also been a catalyst for addressing that other gap identified in the employee satisfaction surveys: rewards and recognition.

"We want an engaged culture—getting people to engage better across teams, within themselves, back with their customers and back with their partners, and to use Whole Brain® Thinking to help them develop their communication skills," Poole says. "That's where the Integ Gets Red Program links to our rewards and recognition program."

The Integ Gets Red Awards Program is one more way the company is keeping interpersonal thinking top of mind. Using the Red Balloon Reward Company, this points-based incentive program includes several different awards:

- **Integ Values Award:** All Integ employees are encouraged to nominate their peers to recognize values behavior.
- **Red Hat Reward:** Customers and peers are encouraged to nominate strong customer satisfaction.
- **Red Team Reward:** Customers and peers are encouraged to recognize great teamwork.
- **Red Hot Performer:** Managers are encouraged to reward top employee performance.

RESULTS:

Stronger teamwork and productivity, greater employee engagement and retention, and consistent delivery of excellence to Integ's external customers.

"The HBDI® is a wonderful instrument, and our teams actually use it in meetings to guide their thinking through the logical sequence of the quadrants."

– Kerry Scotland, Marketing Director, Integ

Poole says the program has had "instant effects" on attitudes and engagement levels within the organization.

"Awareness of a colleague's thinking preferences and having a newfound respect for them has eased the communication difficulty that existed between varying teams," he says. "There is now more of an appreciation and awareness of how different individuals think."

Adds Scotland, "The HBDI® is a wonderful instrument, and our teams actually use it in meetings to guide their thinking through the logical sequence of the quadrants."

Many employees have mounted their HBDI® Profiles on their desks to help build understanding of how they prefer to think and to forge stronger connection and collaboration between those with different thinking preferences. It's a proactive approach that is paying off internally, by breaking down communication barriers and fostering greater engagement, as well as externally, in the way people think about and approach their customers.

Russell Jones, Channel Manager at Alcatel-Lucent's Enterprise Division, has already seen improvements in Alcatel's interaction with Integ. "I have seen an increase in our communication and recognition of Integ's employees from our team. It's so good to have a formal avenue to recognize outstanding work, applaud great results and cement our teams further."

It's clear that Integ isn't just "getting red;" it's keeping thinking top of mind—and that's keeping people engaged with their work, with their customers and with each other.

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