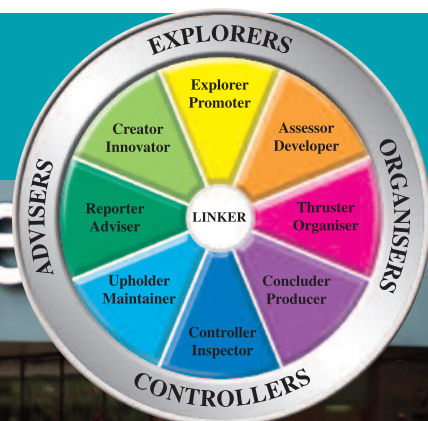


Never knowingly unbalanced



The Team Management Profile has helped create a more cohesive, focused and effective procurement team at John Lewis Partnership. The challenge now is to use the insights gained to help the leadership team manage significant change.

When Rob Turner joined John Lewis Partnership as head of procurement operations in August 2015, he inherited a team that he describes as "a little bit dysfunctional". The introduction of a new operating model, accompanied by a substantial restructure of the 70-strong procurement group - not to mention five different leaders in as many years - had caused considerable disruption.

"I had one-to-ones with all 40 people in my team, and it quickly became very clear to me that most hadn't adapted to their new 'teams'," says Rob. "They didn't know each other or each other's capabilities very well, so they didn't know how to work effectively together. There was confusion about who was supposed to be doing what and, not surprisingly, there was an underlying unhappiness."

His initial aim was to set a vision for his team, which he hoped would help create some focus and cohesion, and to do some work to help them get to know each other better and, as a result, work more effectively together.

He had worked with independent consultant Andy Scoble in a previous role at Tarmac, and invited him in to help run a one-day workshop, which would include a Margerison-McCann Team Management Profile session. "I thought that would help me to do a 're-baselining' of this group and lay the basic foundations on which I could start to rebuild the team," says Rob.

The first part of the day, in November 2015, was concerned with setting some direction for the group - something that Rob realised had been noticeably absent. "It was an opportunity to

allow people to write things down, get things off their chest and talk about what was working well and what wasn't. For me it was a chance to feed back common themes that I'd picked up on from the one-to-ones I'd done with them at the outset and match those against what they were saying in the session," recalls Rob. "At the end of the morning session we all had a clear view of where we should be going and the kind of values we should be working with."

The group had completed their Profiles in advance, and the second part of the day was devoted to giving people feedback on those and, says Rob, "unpacking and digesting what that told us about ourselves, both as individuals and a group."



While the team was fairly balanced in the sense of having representation around the Team Management Wheel, people were weighted in the top right-hand quadrant - particularly in Thruster-Organiser roles. "That didn't surprise me: we are operations people, so we are 'doers'," says Rob. More interesting was where people fell on the four scales - extrovert/introvert, practical/creative, analytical/beliefs and structured/flexible - which determine, respectively, how people relate with others, how they gather and use information, how they make decisions and how they organise themselves and others.

"Andy puts a scale along a wall, lines people up according to where their net preference lies, and asks people on each side of the scale how they feel, for example, when they are interacting with someone on the opposite side, what the challenges are," explains Rob. "That exercise really wakes up people's senses and makes them realise why they tend to get the responses they do."

The team then discussed how to use these attributes when forming working groups. "For example, if you are a 'doer', but you find it difficult to think through ideas and plan solutions, who on the team could you turn to for help?"

Rob always uses the Team Management Profile when he needs help with team building. "It allows you to think things through in a highly practical way, because it is so easy to relate the insights directly to day-to-day working," he says.

But while he is wary about 'overkill', he was heartened when one of his team asked if he could run a Team Management Profile session for

his own team, where there were several new members. This was significant because this individual had previously been sceptical about the potential benefits of profiling tools. However, having been perceived as 'very different' by some of his colleagues, he used the insights from the Team Management Profile to change his approach. "He's become a much more central and focused member of the team as a result. He's really flourished over the past year," says Rob.

“ we have to balance different needs in terms of the way we announce and deliver change

Other members of Rob's team, such as Hannah Smillie, a relatively new and very high-potential graduate [see box], use the Team Management Profile on a daily basis, and are enthusiastic advocates, he continues.

Rob thinks the people at the extreme ends of the four preference measures felt the biggest impacts from the session, in terms of why certain behaviours by others felt the way they did, and how to adjust their own behaviours in order to relate to them more effectively. "Before the Team Management Profile we quite often used to shut the extroverts up," recalls Rob. "In the session people were able to articulate how they felt about that - for instance, the introverts would say 'you come and tell me all sorts of things but I have to process the information before I can do anything with it.'"

In January 2016 Rob's boss, the procurement director, asked him to organise a two-day

strategy planning workshop for the three 'heads of' (including Rob) and the senior management team. One of the objectives was for people to get to know each other better, so Rob enlisted the support of Andy Scoble and the Team Management Profile again. "We were a very new team; we'd only worked together for five or six months," says Rob. "The 'heads of' roles were new, I and my two peers were all new to John Lewis, and there were changes at the senior management level too. We used the Team Management Profile to create a bit of self-awareness before getting into the strategic planning process."

Andy takes up the story. "That was a really insightful, productive two days," he recalls. "The team were nearly all Creator-Innovators. They got on fantastically well, they buzzed with ideas, they were very strategic and they thought they had productive meetings. But they didn't actually achieve very much. What's more, they were struggling to connect with the wider procurement team - they were running ahead with their blue-sky ideas but there was little detail or follow through and the team below were frustrated."

Rob concurs: "Three of the top team are Creator-Innovators, and the other is an Explorer-Promoter," he says. "We had lots of meetings where we rambled on, but though we had great chats there wasn't much action. It made us acutely aware of the need to do something about the way we were communicating. We needed to articulate much more clearly, in much greater detail and with much more structure, what we wanted the people below us to do. Because to them it felt that nothing was happening."



As a result of the two-day strategy workshop the top team identified six strategic priorities and decided to form working parties around each of them. The team had been thinking about creating a 'development role' for a high-potential individual, who could essentially project manage activities and meetings, provide some structure and organisation, and ensure that actions proposed by the leadership team were followed through. Rob says that the Team Management Profile work clarified exactly what was required in that role, helped to design the job specification and opened up discussions at interview. "The individual we appointed to the role is highly effective," he says.

The procurement director was so pleased with the results of the Team Management Profile work that he got the remainder of the function (two category management teams) to do it, and then organised a full departmental away day for the entire team in late spring. "Some people maybe thought it was a bit excessive, but it gave us the opportunity to do the work at scale, and unpack it all as a complete group," says Rob. "It was highly interactive, and very visual - we mapped everyone on a giant Wheel and got them to wear appropriate-coloured caps. In the past we had been quite siloed in terms of the way the different functional teams performed, and these exercises really helped to break down some of those boundaries."

After a year of using the Team Management Profile with different groups within procurement to help to create more effective, focused and purposeful team working, Rob feels he has made significant progress. "The Team Management Profile has worked very well indeed in helping

people to understand and engage with each other better, which is a cornerstone of team building. But we still have work to do on how we manage change.

"He explains that he and the senior leadership team are working out how to prepare the procurement function for the future, in order to meet the rapidly changing needs of the business and keep abreast of the rapidly changing nature of the discipline itself. As part of that, they are seeking to establish what they can learn from problems with the current operating model so as to be able to deliver continuous improvement.

“ now we're getting more things right than wrong ”

These things require lots of change, and the unique culture of the John Lewis Partnership poses an additional challenge when it comes to determining the best way to manage that change. "It's a democracy: people like a say in things and they don't like big surprises," explains Rob. "At the moment we tend to jump from one mode of operation to another, reacting rather than being proactive, and our recent annual Partnership survey gave us some food for thought. Procurement was the lowest scoring team, in terms of engagement, out of the whole of Partnership Services (the shared services centre). We have had a couple of leadership meetings recently where 'lightbulbs' have gone on and we've realised how we have to balance different people's needs in terms of the way we announce and deliver change. Some people

require lots of structure and others prefer a more fluid, flexible approach, and we have to take account of both."

Andy says that the John Lewis Partnership has reaped benefits from the Team Management Profile at individual, team and organisational level. "Big boards in the office display all the summary data from Team Management Profile exercises, and everyone has access to each other's Profiles," he says. "They use this as a quick aide memoire when they are communicating with others, and they sometimes deliberately take an issue to someone with a different preference in order to get a different perspective."

At a team level, the working parties established to address the strategic priorities have a wider representation of members than 'the usual suspects', and meetings are more effective now that teams understand the need to operationalise and embed ideas. And at an organisational level, the group has worked on how to tackle gaps and inherent weaknesses in its structure - including the creation of the development role.

Rob says that the leadership and senior management team is not quite at the stage where they are "unconsciously competent" when it comes to using the insights they've gained from the Team Management Profile work. "We still have to think about it. Once it flows naturally, and becomes part of the DNA of how we do things, we'll really be on the path to success," he says. "Six months ago we were getting more things wrong than right, and now we're getting more things right than wrong. But this is a marathon, not a sprint."

Hannah Smillie
assistant e-sourcing manager, Procurement

"My Profile was strangely accurate. It was stuff that I knew, but hadn't really thought about. Now I'm much more conscious of my preferences and those of others, and I bring those into play when I book meetings, for example, and when someone reacts to me in a certain way I understand why.

I think the Team Management Profile exercises - like where Andy lined us all along the wall according to where we sat on the four scales - were the most valuable. You can suddenly see why you clash with people: they're not being difficult, it's just the way they are.

For example, my manager doesn't like being put on the spot, whereas I'm quite impetuous. Now I book a meeting if I want to discuss something with him - even if it's just a five minute catch-up over coffee. I give him an agenda in advance and when we meet he's had time to think about it and can give me a considered response. It's more effective too because we're more focused: what might have taken an hour in the past we can now cover in half that time. I'm very happy to accommodate his preferred way of working because I get so much more out of him.

The Team Management Profile has helped our teamworking too. We have two offsite whole-team days every year, where we split people into teams to complete a variety of exercises. Now we use people's Profiles to ensure we create balanced teams for those exercises. We don't replicate that in the business yet, but I'm sure it's only a matter of time."



“ You can suddenly see why you clash with people: they're not being difficult, it's just the way they are