

Creating a Culture of Innovation for Coors



The Problem

- In 1997 Bass Brewers (now Coors Molson) was a successful company, brewing the No.1. lager in the UK – Carling - as well as a number of other successful alcohol brands
- However the leadership team had come to recognise that in order to become a world class business they would need to address some of the cultural baggage that comes with being a company steeped in a history that reaches back to 1777

Some of the issues included:

- A culture of tradition and hierarchy in a staid oak panelled environment
- Poor collaboration between functions resulting in a tendency to kill ideas early on through an overly critical approach
- The leadership team had also identified innovation as the engine to drive market share and growth – they now needed a partner to help them get there

The Process

Working with the leadership team we immersed ourselves in the organisation:

- In-depth interviews from all ranks and disciplines within the organisation
- Group workshops were then held to help build individual and collective innovation and creativity visions with a focus on new product development

The Solution

The team created a process for the leaders of the innovation group that addressed the following steps:

- Awareness – of personal leadership strengths and weaknesses plus leadership shadow
- Vision – knowing what it takes to be a leader for creativity and translating this into a vision for me
- Transformation – what I do and more crucially how I do it
- Sustaining – having support to help me get to my vision and to course correct along the way
- Measurement – feedback from peers and my team

This created a positive leadership force to create and sustain the innovation capability long term within the business. Amongst the wider group (totalling about 300 people who functionally worked in marketing, npd and technical) an on-going process of training, development and stimulus programmes was developed to create capability around innovation and support structures to help them function as a group.

The Results

Bass (now Coors) boasts a powerful and productive culture specifically focussing on innovation.

Overall company value increased as a result and was evidenced in the sale to Coors: “The potential buyers (Coors who became the eventual purchasers) put a value on ideas and innovation that affected the purchase decision and price”

[Mark Hunter](#)

Enhanced internal capabilities has reduced reliance on external suppliers saving £500,000 pa.

An on-going flow of successful npd is evidenced with the launches of Reef (£150m pa), Arc and the Carling Fridge Pack. Creativity and innovation capability has also been used to address other issues including the development and launch of a new packaging plant without losing production on the current plants, cost savings around distribution and other non-typical innovation areas.

"It's very difficult to remember now what life was like before we started on the journey. We've come so far I find it difficult to compare and contrast. It's had a huge effect on the cultural development of Coors."

[Mark Hunter](#) Chief Commercial Officer, Molson Canada (previously Marketing and International Development Director at Bass and then Coors)

"There's an instinctive openness, a creativity that we don't have in Golden yet! (Coors head office in Colorado). The culture is different and ?What If! is a big part of that." [Dave Thomas, Coors Head Office USA](#)

"I would say that the transformation has been profound. If you take Technical, for example, when we started out it was very traditional. It was organised into six teams that barely talked to each other, let alone to other departments! Now people want to move into the technical area because the environment there is such a joy to work in. We've even had a finance manager move down to work there. It's definitely helped recruitment and retention of staff."

[Martin Thomas, Technical Director, Coors](#)

"Working with Coors, there are three things that really typify to me the relationship and why it's been so successful:

1. Trust and respect – Coors trusted in our expertise and craft and equally we listened to them about what was needed and would work for their business
2. A pioneering spirit – Coors really wanted to push their business forward and they were happy to take risks and try new ways of working. They did not rely on tried and trusted methodologies or off-the-shelf models as they knew they might not really work for them
3. Valuing individuals – together we knew it was about engaging every member of the organisation and letting them make innovation real for themselves individually. In this way we knew they would find the motivation to ultimately be part of changing the organisation at every level - from the CEO to the PA's. It was an approach that let individuals make it happen and embed firmly within the organisation, not a sheep-dip approach destined to fail!" [Norma McComb, ?What If!](#)

