

## International Team Building at VSO

### The organisation

VSO is an international development charity promoting volunteering to fight global poverty and disadvantage. VSO is a federation, the members of which are based around the world with International Communications and Marketing teams based in the UK providing co-ordination and best practice. VSO's structure is a matrix in which in-country professionals report to their local Director with a 'dotted line' relationship to the international co-ordination teams.

### The need

An international conference was arranged to bring together the communications and marketing professionals from each federation member. The challenge was to make the most of the limited time the team members had together by balancing team building and project activities. There were also a number of team dynamics issues along with some resistance to VSO's internationalisation change agenda.

### What we did

The first step was for Jacqueline to work with Jo Addison, the International Head of Communications, and Gemma Hoskins, the International Marketing Manager, to explore what they wanted to be different as a result of the conference. From these discussions Jo and Gemma identified the following objectives:

- To create an open, positive environment where the team could share best practice, their views, and make productive suggestions
- For the International Communications team members to meet each other for the first time
- To develop both the International Communications and International Marketing teams' effectiveness by better understanding the context in which they are working, clarifying goals, understanding more about themselves as individuals and how to best to work with each other, sharing strengths and skills and learning from other team members, agree ways of working as a team, and agreeing individual roles in supporting team processes
- To progress internationally co-ordinated projects and to gain a common understanding amongst the International Marketing Team of their targets and finances.

Jacqueline worked with Jo and Gemma to develop an agenda for the 3 day event, based on a well-researched team effectiveness model and incorporating diagnostics to help team members explore their own learning and communication preferences and those of their colleagues. Given the change management challenge, it was also important that team members understood the context, so Jacqueline suggested the involvement of VSO's senior management team. The conference opened with a video by VSO's Federation Director explaining the external and internal context, and VSO's HR Director provided input to the Values project session. The conference was co-facilitated with Jacqueline either taking the lead or supporting Jo and Gemma so that they could be participants in the relevant sessions whilst retaining ownership and leadership of the conference.

## **Benefits**

At the end of the conference Jo reported that the International Communications team had measured a significant improvement in how effective they felt they were as a team in terms of goal clarity, understanding the role of the team and their own roles as individuals, how the team could work together more effectively, and team spirit. The majority of the International Marketing team felt that the conference objectives had been met, 83% felt that their personal objectives had been met, and a further 13% that they had been exceeded.

Jacqueline carried out a further evaluation a couple of months after the workshop. Jo reported that there was a continuing sense of team cohesion and members were making their own arrangements to see each other again. Jo also reported that another effect of the conference had been an improvement in the relationships between her and the Federation Member directors.

## **Comments from VSO**

“The face-to-face interaction and topics discussed at the conference has made it much easier to work together and identify the ways in which work overlaps. More importantly we are all able to identify the specific knowledge and information that can help support other members. The conference allowed the team to give thought to their work and celebrate the successes of the last few years, as well as hear about similar issues and challenges faced by their colleagues.”

Gemma Hoskins, International Marketing Manager