

TESTIMONY

The "Behavior Champions" at Pfizer Ltd

Interview with **Philip WATTS**, customer marketing director, Pfizer Limited (UK)

Pfizer Ltd, the UK branch of the American pharmaceutical company, has around 120 "behavior champions". They are the driving force behind cultural change, and work from within the company's field force – in all areas – to inspire a process of "viral change" in terms of the individual behavior that needs to be adopted to enhance performance. Everything began in 2005, in the sales department.

The results of the annual employee review, which is carried out every autumn by Pfizer Ltd, were published in September 2005. "It's an assessment of the way in which we put our values into action", Mr Watts explains. Feedback from the sales force, of which he was then director, was mixed – the teams said they understood Pfizer Ltd's mission and their role in the company, but remained vague about the culture in the sales department. "The reps didn't really have a clear idea of exactly how they should behave with colleagues and customers", Mr Watts explains.

Philip Watts then met Leandro Herrero*, who was working as a consultant in the company, and was very interested to hear his assessment of the situation: "Many organizations that want to establish a specific culture begin by describing it and then try out various action plans to implement it. On the contrary, the culture is a product of the behaviors that the team has succeeded in developing". So, how can companies identify and then implement these behaviors?

Defining the new behavioral imperatives

At the beginning of 2006, Philip Watts began the process with three to four days of intensive brainstorming with his immediate reports: "We discussed all the important issues in our company – our environment and what it means to work at Pfizer, and so on". The results of these discussions were then condensed into four "key behavioral imperatives":

1. "Business results come first"
2. "Feedback and recognition"
3. "Keeping promises"
4. "Living a shared agenda with the customer"

"We realized that if we were able to implement these imperatives, we'd be able to develop the culture we need to make progress", Mr Watts explains.

Biography



Philip WATTS graduated in zoology from the University of London, and is a biologist by profession. He began his career in the pharmaceutical industry in 1984, in the sales department at Pfizer Ltd, the UK subsidiary of the American pharmaceutical giant. Having been responsible for sales, he became the department's manager and then director in

2000. In 2006, Philip Watts was appointed customer marketing director at Pfizer Ltd. With 122,000 employees in 60 countries, Pfizer is the world's leading private investor in biomedical research and markets its drugs in more than 150 countries. Pfizer has been present in England since the 1950s, and has 6000 employees. After Pfizer's acquisition of Pharmacia, it became the country's largest pharmaceutical company in 2003.

A new methodology: viral change

The four policies then needed to be translated into "clear and concrete actions" for the teams. This involved deciding which methodology to use to explain the importance of these behavioral imperatives and promote them in the sales department. The task force took two major decisions:

1. To implement the four imperatives sequentially to avoid burdening the employees with too much change at any one time.
2. To avoid traditional channels of communication whereby, following the initial briefing by Philip Watts' leadership ●●

... team, the directives would be passed down to the respective leaders, the managers, and then the sales reps. The behavioral imperatives were going to be implemented in a more ad hoc way – by "behavior champions". This is how the process of viral change would be set in motion.

The "Behavior Champions"

In the spring of 2006, Philip Watts held a meeting with twenty or so senior sales managers to explain the methods that had been chosen and obtain their support. A discussion then followed about the profile of these "champions". Ideally, they would have a large network of contacts, be able to sell their ideas, have all the right experience, and be respected by their colleagues. "I asked the managers to send me a list of people they thought matched this description. To my great surprise, each manager immediately made a note of two or three people and I received a list of sixty people, 95% of whom were sales reps in the field".

Philip Watts then held a meeting with the people whose names had been put forward to explain the project, its stage of development, and tell them that he needed their help to implement it step by step. "But, there was no question of making them feel like they were the "voicepiece" of management. They had the choice to accept or refuse to take part in the project. We also told them about the special conditions that would make the task easier – unlimited mobile phone calls to their colleagues, the possibility of covering the costs of any future informal working sessions, and so on". At the end of the meeting, all the people present agreed to take part in the project.

Their mandate:

- To describe in detail what "business results come first" actually means in terms of behaviors in the field.

- Once identified, to discuss the necessary behaviors with all those around them – their colleagues and managers. "They collected success stories from people who began to take a different approach in an attempt to spread the message that "business results take precedence over everything else", Philip Watts explains. "As these stories have spread, they've become part of the company folklore and, after only a month, many people have integrated this new language into their daily working lives. Starting with only 66 people, we've been able to "infect" all the sales forces and, soon afterwards, the whole company".

The whole company took these steps

This pilot scheme was adopted throughout Pfizer Limited to introduce an entirely new corporate culture. Pfizer Limited has just undergone a major transformation after a restructuring programme. "We had to make tough decisions. In the United Kingdom we had to transform our entire structure and processes. Changing behaviors has facilitated the management of this transformation, enabled it to work in the long term, and become an integral part of the organization".

There are around 120 "behavioral champions" spread throughout the company. The concept is the same – it involves defining behaviors identified by the management, promoting these behaviors and introducing the teams to a new culture". We didn't want an operation that's only effective in the short term. Today, 18 months after the launch of this operation, our champions are still here –motivated, involved, and very positive", concludes Philip Watts. ■

* Author of *Viral Change*, see the summary of the book on p. 3.

What lessons has Philip Watts learnt from this experience?

- The people we approached were committed in their involvement. When their director gave them a direct mission, they understood that we were placing our trust in them and that top management was directly involved. This sponsorship is a vital component in the operation's success and more specifically in motivating the "champions".
- We opted for a viral communication process based on storytelling rather than through PowerPoint slides. The exchange is far more effective, because the Participant understands what needs to be done to adopt the new behavior.
- There was no detailed roadmap or specific tools, and everyone was free to choose their modus operandi. They could organise meetings, invite people to take part in impromptu discussions in the cafeteria, conduct telephone interviews, and so on. This point is particularly important: you must not over-formalize the process.
- Lastly, we made a mistake by only briefing the "champions". On the ground, certain people felt hampered by line managers, who felt excluded. If I could change something, I would involve them to a greater degree, explain our objectives, and why we were pursuing them.

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A Passionate Architect of Viral Change

Interview with **Pierre MORGON**, Director, Primary Care Business Unit, Schering-Plough (France)

Pierre Morgon's career is characterised by two passions: teams and their dynamics, and the challenges posed by "dangerous" changes. He remembers the last transformation where he was the change architect: at Bristol-Myers Squibb, between 2004 and 2006. He implemented some of the main tenets of viral change to bring together 180 employees, who until then were isolated in four independent spheres.

Pierre Morgon knows how to manage delicate changes! And he readily embraces the resulting human challenges. Several times he has gone through the difficult exercise of having to "get a team to do things differently at the same time as making them create the right environment for fostering ideas and business profitability". And, as he continues, "every time, my mission has been to take over from disastrous, or at least tricky, situations characterized by poorly functioning teams and the necessity for real transformation".

In 2001, he met Leandro Herrero, while preparing *The Leader With Seven Faces**, which already broached an essential issue addressed in *Viral Change*: How can we convince others to change? "The leader has to demonstrate that he can take on a role that he would not necessarily have been inclined to adopt". And, in doing so, others would be more inclined to do likewise, comments Pierre Morgon. When he joined Bristol-Myers Squibb in 2004, he decided to implement this characteristic of viral change in order to surpass the challenges that were awaiting him.

The Bristol-Myers Squibb case

Three business units were operating successfully, each independent of each other: Oncology, Virology, and the Neurosciences (alcohol rehabilitation and schizophrenia treatment). Each unit comprised three poles: Marketing, Sales, and Specific Programs. The hospital sales department was composed of two posts: field managers; charged with controlling hospital markets, and those responsible for contract-based solutions on the market. Pierre Morgon's mandate was to regroup these four departments (180 people) under the same umbrella: Direction of Hospital Operations of which he was the head. "Some people would see their assignments and/or reporting lines change. Others would have to work closely with new people, or at least in a more formalized way and more productively".

Biography



Pierre MORGON is a Doctor of Pharmacy, holds a doctorate in Business and Economic Law, and has a MBA from Essec (a leading French business school). He has over twenty years' experience of implementing change in the pharmaceutical industry, and contributed to the complete overhaul of a strategic planning

process at Aventis Pasteur International. As general manager at Yamanouchi Pharma France, he set up a performance monitoring system during a merger with another Japanese pharmaceutical company. When he was VP of Hospital Operations at Bristol-Myers Squibb, he succeeded in merging dispersed business units into a single coherent entity. Since 2005, Pierre Morgon has been director of Primary Care at Schering-Plough, where he has merged the Sales and Marketing divisions.

The initial difficulties in the face of change

Pierre Morgon rapidly identified a certain number of difficulties while taking up his new position:

1. The teams' obvious rejection to the creation of a new management level.
2. Intelligently making the therapy marketing and sales unit work together with the sales managers, because these two groups have traditionally ignored each other and never formalized a common plan of action.
3. Coordinating this new hospital function with the other organizational functions.

Apart from the few "disappointments" (one of Pierre Morgon's direct reports revealed himself to be unhappy at ...)

... his post as VP) and concealed or obvious disputes, Pierre Morgon was confronted by certain dysfunctions (lack of coordination, frictions, and belittling, while the objective was to federate a coherent entity), the culture needed to change, “just like dissolvable stitches that are designed to disappear rapidly while ensuring that the wound closes properly”.

Making the existing behaviors visible

Helped by Leandro Herrero, Pierre Morgon wanted everybody to be aware of their own personality and its impact on the functioning of teams. He invited the whole of management and their subordinates (“all those of which I was likely to count on or who would be in a situation of authority”) to establish their psychological profiles. “We carried out a psychological “striptease”, and I was the first one to set the example of mutual understanding and sharing”. Next, the working group focused on scenarios for collective working methods “in order to make our existing behaviors more visible and more easily identify the drivers of change”. Finally, when the targeted initiatives were launched, they relied on the specific actions of a dozen key actors, the “change champions”.

The key role of “change champions”

It does not necessarily have to be the best speakers or top managers; those who are respected and followed will be more susceptible at provoking a viral change. “They have to show that they can behave differently and as it happens, that they are able to work together”, explains Pierre Morgon.

In order to identify the “change champions”, he relied on his management style, which is focused on listening. “When meeting with the teams, I noticed that the same names kept coming up. If these people set the example, I knew that the others would follow”, continues Pierre Morgon. Backed by his dozen champions and endowed with a “good behavioral tool bag”, he put in place working parameters that allowed them to assume their new and exemplary roles in terms of cooperation.

Different methods have accelerated and reinforced their potential influence: direct communication, changing job descriptions, and adding a mission statement. “For example, the administrative director in charge of hospital contracts revealed himself to not only want to contribute, but also to be a goldmine of information on the administrative and legal aspects of those markets. Therefore, I made him come to the committees in order to explain the technical problems he was facing and propose solutions. He also needed to have an impact on the different procedures and internal information exchange. He thus became a connection between various people working in isolation and the model to follow in bettering relations between two people formerly incapable of cooperating”, illustrated Pierre Morgon.

The result: a brilliant team

The virus spread: “The employees discovered the depth of their potential and new methods of working together”, remarks Pierre Morgon. On top of that, the frictions and belittlements progressively disappeared. Not only was the organizational change well enacted and received, Pierre Morgon’s team also became more resilient: the team was eventually capable of functioning without a boss for seven months. “They even “survived” the departure of my boss, who was a very charismatic and emblematic person”, adds Pierre Morgon. While his successor presented a more administrative management style, the team knew how to continue with the positive dynamic that it had acquired.

Today, in his position with a new pharmaceutical laboratory, Pierre Morgon continues to be a passionate architect of cultural change. He leaves us with a few key lessons from his experience with viral change (see box below). ■

* meetingminds, June 2006.

Five lessons from a passionate architect of viral change

1. Do not “over script” the initiatives, in order to avoid the dichotomy of daily tasks and the change program.
2. Even though the viral change is not difficult to put in place technically, **the director should prepare himself to expend a large amount of energy** and to manage a real mental chessboard.
3. **Behaviors will not last unless people find them** essential and beneficial. Contrary to continued change ordered by the board, viral change works on the ground, where it is directly moulded by its recipients.
4. As it is extremely involving and takes a great deal of empathy, **viral change does not suffer from managers who have a utilitarian vision of other people.**
5. **The first accelerator of viral change is the identification of people who resist change:** “knowing how to convince one amongst them is the best vitamin boost for the others, champions, passives, or traditionalists”, concludes Pierre Morgon.