

ringier
axel springer



Case study

Ringier Axel Springer Polska is the leading print and online media group. It formed in 2012 after one of the biggest mergers on the Central Eastern Europe publishing market.

Impact supported Ringier Axel Springer Polska's transformational change process by building leadership capability and a culture of agility and collaboration.



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Cultural transformation at RAS Polska

Kontekst

Ringier Axel Springer Polska (RASP) merger involved four separate organisations but specifically the coming together of Ringier Axel Springer (RAS) Polska and Onet.pl. These two companies had a great many differences, including distribution channels (RASP being predominantly print-based media and Onet being a digital publisher - the largest Polish web portal) and a different history of ownership (Onet being proud of its Polish 'start up' roots with RAS Media AG epitomizing a corporate global player).

The most difficult challenge was the merging of a number of very different cultures in a very complex organisational structure - that included divisions between the multiple organisations and departments. This absence of an agreed approach to culture resulted in a high level of mistrust.

For this significant transformation to be successful there was an urgent need to create and implement a new and unified strategy. However, people were unclear about what the strategy was - the only strategies to exist were for separate parts of the business.

It was identified that simultaneously developing a strong leadership capacity and culture combined with a winning business strategy would integrate multiple business units '**Under One Roof**' and would be fundamental to the success of the business transformation

"Working with Impact is a great experience and leadership journey for all managers. By drilling leadership situations down to their essence we gain wisdom through reflection. I see my team grow after every session making me very proud."

- **Mark Dekan** CEO Ringier Axel Springer Polska; CEO Ringier Axel Springer Media AG

Impact and RAS Polska has won Business Culture Award for Best Integration & Merger Initiative and was highly commended in Best Business Culture Transformation Initiative category.

Business
Culture
Awards
2019
Winner



Objective

RASP partnered with leadership and culture change experts, Impact. They worked closely with the RASP Group Executive Board (top team), HR Director and Transformation Team over three years to develop an integrated change solution **to meet strategic objectives with two behavioural change focuses:**

- 1. Leadership**, to continue to build strong leadership at all levels to create and sustain a common culture of trust and engagement across the organisation.
- 2. Culture**, to prepare and enable an agile business approach to:
 - Better anticipate and respond quickly to continuously changing market conditions and customer needs,
 - Develop leaders who provide clarity and empowerment for proactive decision making and seizure of new market opportunities.

Thoughts from participants:

"Module 3 provided a completely different experience - very specific and action-based activities that also allow learning, for example, improving the ability to read between the lines and draw conclusions at a high level. Significant in the context of Data Driven Culture / Data Driven Company - this is an idea that we want to implement in our organization - making informed decisions based on conclusions from hard data."

"There are a lot of experts in our company, smart people who do not take part in the discussion, during this workshop, I had a chance to hear something clever from every person and thank you for that."

Most significantly the improved business culture, in terms of more open dialogue and bottom-up initiatives have proved to be instrumental in a successful integration of four companies into one brand new organisational structure. The increased understanding that the leadership and culture of a business needs to hold equal significance as strategy has been key to the business transformation.

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Solution

The learning journey included more than 20 initiatives for Top Team, Senior and Middle Management levels over a period of more than 3 years. It flowed in sync with the business transformation and enabled people to build trust, let go of assumptions, build an understanding around the need for authentic engagement through involvement and develop skills and tools to sustain the change.

A key differentiator was to use Impact's **experiential learning methodology** providing powerful opportunities for people to experience and learn from their emotions, challenges and situations. This was combined with their innovative approach to organisational change with its **principle belief that widening participation and engaging all levels in owning the change process radically improves the chances of success.**

The co-creation and delivery started with **top team engagement** through in-depth individual interviews, gaining a shared understanding of the change required and improving team effectiveness using **Impact's diagnostic tool (TPI)** for developing team performance. This identified strengths and opportunities to build an informed action plan, leverage strengths to improve challenging domains and agree on a unified purpose.

The series of programmes and interactions ran alongside internal initiatives to make up the whole learning journey. The co-created, multi-mode delivery solution encompassed many different learning approaches that were used throughout all the programmes (**including experiential projects, simulations, community action learning, real business discussions, virtual meetings, practicing skills, self-reflection, coaching, action planning and feedback**). Participants could engage in different ways, reinforcing learning and ensuring it appealed to the variety of learning styles within the diverse groups.

Project consisted of:

1. **'Top Team Leadership Journey'** that strengthened teamwork, leadership capacity and preparation for change implementation.
2. **Multi modular 'Leadership in Action' programmes** for both the executive and manager populations focused on leading self, others and the business. With an additional focus on values for managers.

Solution elements included:

Building a strong leadership action culture – increasing leadership capabilities for all.

Customised business simulation – putting participants in the shoes of their competitors which culminated in a presentation of strategic initiatives to the board.

Community Action Learning (CAL) – working with a charity to support them with the communication of their vision.

Playback feedback of results from workshops and an online survey to the board and wider organisation.

Values and Strategy Ambassadors – Impact designed train-the-trainer workshops to prepare ambassadors to deliver workshops across the business to encourage dialogue around the optimal RASP culture and strategy.

Strategic focus workshops – The top 40 leaders gather twice a year over three days to review the strategy, exchange feedback, integrate and build trust through experiential activities including mini CAL projects.

Result

Culture integration takes time, intense investment and engagement of the entire workforce and we are pleased to see some clear indicators of success.

- Strengthened trust between the top team and the rest of the organisation. Engagement survey participation increased from 59% to 82%, – 6p.p. increase in engagement.
- The top team has built the strategy with people not for them – through several initiatives and across the entire organisation.
- The creation of the **strategy cycle process** has improved implementation of important strategic business initiatives such as: creating a vision and a strategic direction for the company, developing a Process Excellence Programme, improving business structure and clarifying the decision-making process, roles and responsibilities.
- Shared knowledge and understanding about the RASP business strategy through a clear unified purpose has led to people from all different parts of the business having meaningful conversations around strategy. Marcin Boroszko, Board Member stated, **"Two years ago, we spent time getting along with each other about what the words/terminals we use mean. Now we can have strategic discussions in a wide range of languages."**
- The initiatives have brought people together, resulting in a more collaborative and co-operative culture. Eg: a project to establish a set of RASP values involved more than 500 people. Teams created a universal code of behaviour and brought the values to life. This initiative was driven from the bottom-up and created a great energy across the organisation.
- Key leaders have had the opportunity to develop their leadership capacity and increase trust. 72% of managers (n-1 and n2) said that they had developed new leadership skills and knowledge

The learning journey was continuously developed throughout the transformation process – the close working partnership between Impact and the team at RASP allowed there to be an agility to the change process, whilst still maintaining consistency, relevance and strategic alignment throughout all the different programmes.

It was also important for RASP to strengthen the company's contribution to society. The inclusion of a powerful community action learning project that involved working with a charity for abused children was an inspirational element to the project.

Cultural transformation is an inherent part of business transformation. The innovative approach RASP adopted was a significant differentiator in making this project a success. It included:

- **Doing change with people, not to them** – this provided engagement across all levels (board, directors, senior management and managers).
- **People owning what they create** – achieved through having change agents from within the organisation who ran interactive workshops on values and strategy.
- **Linking people strategy with business strategy** – the three key themes of leadership, culture and strategy were always interlinked.