

CASE STUDY

Creating a new challenging strategy at Sweett Group

Sweett Group is an independent global provider of professional services for the construction and management of building and infrastructure projects. With a turnover of £88m, the Group predominantly specialises in quantity surveying and project management services. The CEO had recently been appointed and made the strategic decision to sell off the Asia Pacific business. He called on Berkeley to help him create a new business strategy covering Sweett Group's target markets, people and operating model.

“Berkeley provided objectivity and challenge that could not have been provided internally. This was a great experience and a vital component in establishing our future strategy.”

Douglas McCormick, Chief Executive Officer, Sweett Group

Facing structural change

In 2007 Sweett Group floated on the LSE AIM market to fund a period of growth, mainly through acquisition, creating a global footprint spanning 18 countries across Europe, North America, the Middle East and Asia Pacific. Whilst the Group's performance in the UK and Europe was strong with a growing market share across a diverse range of sectors, performance in Asia Pacific and the Middle East had been challenging. The new CEO, along with the Board, made the strategic decision to sell the Asia Pacific business, in order to reinvest and grow their UK and European businesses and expand in North America.

Challenging times

This was a huge structural change for Sweett Group and a new business strategy that focused on building on the strengths of the business after the disposal of Asia Pacific was required. Berkeley were selected to work with Sweett because our highly collaborative approach worked with stakeholders and focused on building buy-in and engagement to the strategy. There was additional time pressure because a draft of the strategy was needed for a board meeting that was only eight weeks away.

Understanding perceptions

To really understand the key issues and concerns of the business, we conducted over forty in-depth stakeholder interviews across a two week period.

Initially these focused on the Senior Leadership Team, however it became apparent that we needed more input across all levels to fully understand some of the cultural issues that existed and so, we engaged with additional employees



“We are delighted to have been engaged by Sweett Group to help chart their new business strategy at such a pivotal time. The assignment was a great example of how Berkeley like work closely with clients on setting strategy. We brought the structure, stimulus, pace and rigour but the client owned the decisions. Through this approach we covered a lot of ground in just 6 weeks while retaining strong client buy-in to the strategy and next steps.”

Hadley Balwin
Partner



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at all levels from apprentice to regional management. We also interviewed some key clients. Having completed these, we had a clear view on how the business was run and the perceptions of Sweett in the wider market place.

Harnessing the data

The interviews were supplemented by research and benchmarking and we carried out detailed analysis and segmentation of Sweett Group's financial performance. With a very long-standing senior team, this allowed us to challenge the status quo and help the team to consider what could be done differently to improve business performance.

Delivering the message

With the interviews complete, we identified key themes and concerns and ran a series of half day workshops and focus groups. There was some initial resistance to some of the messages but by providing the groups with strong quantitative evidence and allowing them to debate and feedback on the issues, we were able to align with the growth opportunities and a plan to achieve them.

Planning for growth

The final strategy had three key messages around services, structure and people. There would be a focus on growing the core and more profitable areas of Project Management and Quantity Surveying as core services. Organisationally, there would be a radical restructure of the group reflecting the consolidation from a broader international base. With people as their key asset, the third key priority was arguably the most critical: building Sweett Group as the employer of choice in their industry focussing on key elements of their people strategy across recruitment, career offer and reward.

The strategy was endorsed by the Senior Leadership Team and the Board. It was seen by both the Senior Leadership Team and the wider Sweett Group community as a necessary and challenging shift in operations and culture. It was agreed that the strategy would be tested over the remainder of the financial year with a view to launching in full in the new financial year. The new senior team structure had been put in place within three months of the strategy being signed off.

Believing the need for change

Perhaps the most significant achievement of the project was that employees at all levels recognised the need for change and genuinely believed that they could deliver it. Our highly collaborative approach meant that there was a shared belief in the strategy and that there was a real sense of enthusiasm and excitement about the future.

“For the first time since I joined the company Berkeley allowed us to objectively review and challenge issues of real business importance, that had to date been overlooked, ignored, or assumed were the only way we could do things.”

James Grinnell, Group HR Director, Sweett Group

