

Leading Rail Construction, Engineering and Design Company

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Background

Railway construction engineering people are always busy and have to be highly reactive to the daily needs of the business. They really don't have time, or the patience, for doing much other than getting on with the job in hand.

Email has quickly established itself as a key information and communications tool because it is perfectly suited to the reactive and immediate nature of the business. However, it was in danger of being undermined by email and information overload because of poor email practice and management.

The challenge – controlling email overload

To get email back under control and ensure it remained an effective communications tool. To define email best practice and train the organisation to use email more effectively and reactively.

"Because of our reactive culture and way of working – email has enabled us to become even more reactive in our jobs. We can quickly react to an issue and instruct people to do something, chase them and follow-up for progress all by email. Additionally, we were aware that too many people were getting copied on routine email and all too often, email was being used when a phone call might be more effective."

The solution

"We found it was very useful to have an outside consultant with actual experience of helping other companies identify what was email best practice for their culture and industries."

Working with Mesmo Consultancy, the company created an email best practice programme to address the people and processes aspects. To communicate the new approach Monica Seeley ran a series of email best practice workshops. To persuade busy railway engineers to make time for training, Mesmo tailored its workshops into concentrated seventy five minute sessions and worked with the in-house team to create on-line training, email newsletters and tips.

The Outcome – reclaiming lost time

"We did a pre-workshop questionnaire to assess how in control or otherwise people were of their inboxes. Following the workshops we ran a post workshop questionnaire a few weeks later. This showed a significant improvement in individuals' use of time dealing with email. We estimated that if we extrapolated the findings across our business then we were losing £600,000 of time to poor handling of email, unnecessary email, spam and so on. In undertaking the training we covered only around a fifth of our workforce but by training them we estimate that we recovered £90,000 of time lost through ineffective use of email."

"Having undertaken this pilot, our feeling is that we should train the remaining 80% but we will undertake it in 20% chunks and continue to evaluate the results. We've learned that you can't just flick a switch and sort the problem – you have to constantly keep reinforcing the message and the solutions. We do this with Mesmo's help by sending out light-hearted monthly tips and hints via our intranet reminding people of email best practice."