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## ENGINEERING A BETTER FUTURE FOR CLIENTS AND STAFF

SKM uses the Team Management Profile in its Graduate Program and for Management Development.

Global firm Sinclair Knight Merz is not content to simply be a great engineering and project delivery business - its people have to be the best, too.

The technical reputation of Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) is unquestioned. As a world-leading engineering, sciences and project delivery firm, SKM is the mastermind behind projects such as Sydney's new desalination plant and the Eden Project, an acclaimed educational environmental centre in England. Its daily challenges are daunting - the logistical organisation of major building projects, co-ordination of overseas aid activities and the delivery of strategies around mine closure planning and decommissioning.

However, SKM's management takes the view that technical skills are not enough in today's world. It is determined to hone its employees' interpersonal and non-technical skills. The logic is sound: SKM wants well-rounded team leaders who can better interact with clients and other staff to deliver better results for clients and the business itself.

### Taking a Team Approach

To that end, SKM has opted to use Team Management Systems' work-based assessment and feedback instruments to better understand employee work preferences and to help foster superior interpersonal skills. The Team Management Profile (TMP) approach has been instrumental to enhancing a people focused culture at SKM and fits the firm's people philosophy of "participative employee development to achieve each individual's potential".

Libby Bell, SKM's Group Learning and Development Manager, has been one of the internal drivers of the TMP. She says when employees received their Profiles, the results matched expectations - the firm's workforce was dominated by Thruster-Organisers (individuals who are quick to decide, results-orientated and highly analytical) and Assessor-Developers (those who create ideas, are analytical and objective, and who thrive on project work).

"When you look at the scale of the projects undertaken by SKM, it's not surprising that Thruster-Organisers and Assessor-Developers make up a large share of the workforce," Libby says. "After all, most of the professionals in the engineering and scientific fields are likely to be analytical pragmatists."



Libby Bell, Group Learning and Development Manager, Sinclair Knight Merz

## ENGINEERING A BETTER FUTURE FOR CLIENTS AND STAFF CONT.

### Developing Better Managers

To help maintain industry leadership, Libby believes it is essential to underline to SKM staff the value of non-technical skills.

“Managing people and relationships is critical to our success and I recognise that our professional workforce often requires tuition along interpersonal lines,” she says. The firm has a policy whereby all new managers attend a three-day Managing People Program (MPP) that focuses on leadership and interpersonal skills.

“The Team Management Profile is a crucial part of both MPP and our Graduate Development Conference,” Libby confirms. “It really helps us understand the capabilities of new managers and graduates.”

### Six basic steps define the MPP

#### ■ STEP 1: Asking the tough questions

The managers complete the TMP questionnaire online and do the required reading before they attend the MPP.

#### ■ STEP 2: Attending plenary sessions

On day one of the three-day residential program, SKM has a plenary session where it hands out TMPs and explains the concepts to participants. At this stage it is critical to demonstrate how the TMP can be of use to staff, otherwise the sceptics in the group may reject it as useless and undermine the program.

*“The Team Management Profile is a crucial part of both MPP and our Graduate Development Conference. It really helps us understand the capabilities of new managers and graduates.”*

#### ■ STEP 3: Schooling the syndicates

After receiving their TMPs, team members are then assigned to syndicate teams and have three days to prepare a pitch to a ‘client’ (usually a volunteer from senior management). At the start of the session, team members introduce themselves to their peers and draw from their TMP result, with members explaining their preferred style of working and areas in which they may need help.

During the three days, participants attend sessions on selection skills, behavioural interviewing, coaching and ethical dilemmas. Throughout this stage, efforts are made to replicate the unpredictability of a normal project through the introduction of unexpected tasks, such as recruiting a new team member. At the end of the three days, each team does its pitch and the ‘client’ provides feedback.

#### ■ STEP 4: Reviewing team progress

At various points, each syndicate reviews its progress. Team Management Systems provides support through self-assessment material and activities that SKM can use to back up theoretical approaches. Libby says these tools are critical to ensure managers have the opportunity to put the skills into practice. Also key is the way in which the teams’ coaches use the TMS concepts to assess how each team operates: the Types of Work Wheel is used as a project planning tool and a team SWOT analysis is done using a plot of the team’s work preferences. The team plot highlights potential gaps in performance, and problems the teams encounter are typically consistent with their preferences, or rather with gaps in their preferences. This learning ties back to the objective of the program, namely to work as a team to deliver a project.



Participants discussing their work preferences at the SKM Graduate Development Conference

To finish off the program a senior leadership panel hear the participants share their commitments for self-development in a plenary session and the participants write a letter about the changes they want to make in their behaviour.

#### ■ STEP 5: Embedding new skills

Six weeks after the program ends, each of the participant's letters is sent to them. Libby explains: "The letter acts as a reminder for the self-development commitments they made and it prods them to keep practising the skills that will make them better leaders." Many managers also request to have their team members complete the TMP.

#### ■ STEP 6: Evaluating the program

Three to six months after the program, a cross-section of participants is sampled using semi-structured interviews. This feedback is used to evaluate the program and make any necessary adjustments.

A major component of SKM's continued growth is its focus on international expansion. With staff numbering about 6500, it has offices stretching across Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the Middle East, South America and Asia.

"As the volume of overseas work grows, cultural differences become more salient," Libby says.

Given the diversity of the business, she says it is critical for employees to understand and appreciate different work styles across the firm's international operations.

"Cultures vary from country to country - even when people speak the same language. As we recruit people into senior positions we want to encourage understanding and accommodate the work preferences of different cultures."

### Improving Self-Awareness

Libby says the TMP has helped people within the firm to better empathise with each other and adjust working styles as necessary.

"Across SKM we are using virtual teams and alliances more and more," she says. "Sometimes a project can be short term and we have found the TMP can help to establish good understanding quickly for these fluid teams. "It also helps that the TMP is available in a number of languages, so we can roll it out to teams and leaders abroad." Ultimately, she says the TMP has given SKM the edge to ensure staff can improve their self-awareness.

"The Team Management Profile is practical and insightful and it is underpinned by research which makes it credible. It encourages tolerance and diversity, which is important in our business. It gives people a common language to use when discussing team performance and it is now a widely accepted part of our business."



For further information on Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM), visit [www.skmconsulting.com](http://www.skmconsulting.com)

## DIVERSITY ACCEPTING DIVERSITY

Aside from its leadership program, Sinclair Knight Merz also uses the Team Management Profile (TMP) to help develop graduates. Graduates in their second to third year at SKM attend a conference and complete the TMP Questionnaire, after which a debriefing is held and the work preferences of graduates are plotted on the Margerison-McCann Team Management Wheel.

...an innovative young professional approached his general manager to explain that he felt alienated and was considering leaving the team.

At SKM, Reporter-Advisers (helpers, tolerant, flexible) and Creator-Innovators (imaginative, future-oriented) are usually in the minority. After a debriefing at one conference, an innovative young professional approached his general manager to explain that he felt alienated and was considering leaving the team. He felt that his Creator-Innovator work preference explained why he felt like the odd one out in his team.

The revelation prompted the general manager to make a special effort to recognise the preferences of more creative people. The recognition of the value of diversity in team and work styles is growing in SKM.



Margerison-McCann  
Team Management Wheel