



Case Study - Friends of the Earth

Reviewing communication and information management

Friends of the Earth is the largest international network of environmental groups, represented in 71 countries around the world. In the UK it works in more than 200 communities and is one of the leading environmental pressure groups. Since it was set up in 1971, the organisation has achieved many victories for the environment; from saving hundreds of wildlife havens and winning protection for endangered species to blocking unsafe plans for nuclear waste dumping and enabling the passage of five Acts of Parliament.

Friends of the Earth has undergone a number of changes to the way it works which signalled the need to review how well communication and information management within the organisation supports the achievement of its strategic goals. The changes include the reorganisation of its departmental structure into Home and Activity teams to deliver the strategic plan; a commitment to move towards a more participative way of working and the devolvement of decision-making from the Senior Organisational Team; and an increase in regional office-based staff and flexible working.

After successfully securing funding from the Department of Trade and Industry, Friends of the Earth asked HarknessKennett to help them to conduct a review of communication and information management. A cross-organisation project team was set up and HarknessKennett asked to work in partnership to enable the team to help facilitate the qualitative phase of the research. With the organisation committed to participative decision-making, it was clear that a highly involving process would be needed to gain credibility for the review and its findings.

HarknessKennett began the process by interviewing key influencers in the organisation and training the project team to facilitate focus groups. Regular communication updates on the purpose and progress of the review were provided to staff throughout, and a commitment to feedback results to everyone publicised. A questionnaire was developed to provide some quantitative baselines, and focus groups run by the entire project team during the annual staff Awayday. Any members of staff who weren't able to attend were able to fill in a questionnaire online.

HarknessKennett analysed and presented the findings to the project team, prioritising key issues and providing recommendations on appropriate ways forward. The team have since reviewed the recommendations to present internally to the Senior Organisational Team.

"The response to the review was impressive; 74% of our organisation contributed their views. The results have given us some clear improvement targets and strategies for tackling issues around internal communication, decision-making, staff satisfaction, and information management; real priorities for us if we are to achieve our strategic plan.

As well as the results themselves, we have also benefited from the partnership approach adopted by HarknessKennett, helping us to develop a confident team of facilitators who were integral to the success of the process."

Matthew Johnson
Human Resources Officer
Friends of the Earth