



Adding expert industry knowledge to an acquisitions programme

Our client specialises in the design and construction of complex industrial projects in the oil, gas and energy sectors. When the time came to expand, they asked an investment bank for advice. A survey of possible acquisitions was drawn up, and after an initial consideration, they turned to Thism to supplement the bank's advice with mission-critical industry insights.

Of course, they knew that Thism had a great deal of expertise in the sector. But they also knew that we combined that expertise with the highest-level commercial understanding –and so could be invaluable in providing intellectual capital to an extremely high-profile programme.

First of all, we suggested a different way of structuring the existing list of ninety firms. (This helped the client better understand the possible synergies between them and the potential acquisitions.) Next, we offered an analysis of the decisions made to date, offering a fresh point of view on the lists of companies already dismissed or shortlisted.

Perhaps most significantly of all, we asked questions that hadn't been asked. For example: Why had certain companies been omitted from the initial consideration? And by pointing out how the different firms worked to different revenue models, we suggested that closer analysis could prevent unnecessary conflicts with the client in terms of business lifecycles, marketing and risk management.

We're pleased to say that the project worked well for our client and resulted in influencing their acquisition decisions.



Tracking the success of a new organisational structure

A recent re-structure had seen this client move towards a matrix structure, an understandable challenge for all concerned. Thism was invited to audit how the recent changes had affected one of the client's key departments, judge how the department's employees had taken to them and bring to the table expert ideas for further modification.

Thism conducted sixteen interviews and facilitated five discussion groups. From this data, Thism used its sector expertise and management know-how to distil a number of issues and present possible solutions. In the report that followed, these were clearly structured into chapters regarding organisational structure itself, workflow processes, and communication and reporting.

The report took care to celebrate much that was working well, and spent time considering what could be done differently. Recommendations ranged between the highly strategic and the technical (such as advising on when dotted and solid lines should be used on organograms).

Thism also took the future view, elaborating on how future growth might impact the organisation, and also included incidental recommendations which were 'off-piste' but still likely to add value to the client's management.

A brief summary outlined the key findings and provided our client with a hierarchy of desirable actions based on urgency.

What happens when collaboration isn't working perfectly?

Our client is one of the world's largest oil corporations and is currently extracting hydrocarbon reserves from a major oil field. They had appointed a large contractor to deliver front-end engineering and design for their asset development programme – but half-way through, it became apparent that client and contractor could work more collaboratively in line with one another. What could Thism do to help?

Clearly, this was a sensitive situation and one which required every ounce of our operational experience and inter-personal skills. We began by investigating the project in its entirety, looking at a wide range of documentation from progress reports to organisation charts and even e-mail correspondence. Then we embarked on the lengthy but necessary process of talking, in some depth, to individuals in the client and contractor organisations to ensure both view points and needs were understood and addressed.

We interviewed fifty-two people in all – taking care to cover the widest possible range of functions and length of service on the contract. Our questions were carefully designed to uncover the reality behind the perceptions. Among the issues discussed were: How is this project different from others? How do you know when you've met an objective? How precisely is information distributed?

The report we compiled began with a recognition of what the project partners were doing well. Then, we itemised the areas we thought should be improved.



Some of our recommendations were strategic and addressed the organisational structures of both client and contractor; others were tactical and ranged from longer term initiatives to enhance the Graduate Development Programme to more immediate activity which improved e mail etiquette. This also identified numerous quick wins for consideration by senior managers at Project Planning Workshops.

Our client informed us that we played an important role – and in doing so, helped both sides hone skills and behaviours which would be of great use to them for years to come. It was interesting to note that in this highly technical “leading edge” project operation the softer skills of leadership and the behaviours of all team members to each other were equally important to those of technical excellence.



Project post-analysis that encourages global best practice

Our client is a large, multi-divisional player in the oil, gas and energy sectors. Its rapid growth has seen it recently enter the FTSE 100. As part of its commitment to ‘work to world-class standards’, it is interested in identifying and encouraging best practice wherever possible. To that end, it engaged Thism to run a two-day workshop in Moscow designed to identify the ‘lessons learnt’ from a recent project.

After the distribution of a pre-workshop questionnaire, Thism designed a programme schedule that would create a comfortable and productive environment for senior executives. This was based around the acquisition of a number of key outputs. Specifically, these included the identification of aspects that went well; the identification of aspects that went less well; consideration of how unsuccessful aspects might be done differently; formulation of remedies to ensure the unsuccessful aspects were not repeated; and a brainstorm of how the generic ‘lessons learnt’ might be applied to other projects. The workshop – which involved thirty senior personnel plus translators – was judged a success.

Thism was asked to audit the quality of the group’s output by benchmarking it against comparable industry projects, and the resulting document became part of a blueprint of how the client should manage similar projects across the globe.

Using expertise to guide the formulation of an overseas business

When it came to establishing a new business in Algeria, our client needed help to determine their organisation and working strategy. They had options available to them under the licence agreements but were not able to understand the advantages or disadvantages each option held.

Thism was recommended to the company not only for its expertise in project “start up” activities and organisational design, but for its extensive experience of working in Algeria.

The report compiled by Thism was understandably thorough. Firstly, it outlined the historic factors influencing the decision, and gave a digest of the basic advantages and disadvantages associated with each choice. Subsequently, it analysed the effect of the decision in some detail over the projected lifespan of the entity, considering implications to project development and execution, project management and team organisation, and operations. A summary provided an overview of consequences, and also suggested which option made the most sense commercially.

The client took Thism’s advice on board, and the result was a project based on firm foundations which is anticipated to contribute substantial revenues for years to come.

Helping a key division plan for future growth

Thism was invited to offer consultancy to a division of one of our clients – SHERQ – the part of the business that dealt with Safety, Health, Environment, Risk and Quality issues. The big question was: with future growth anticipated, what kind of structure and resources would SHERQ require?

We set to work by breaking the project into two sections. Firstly, we sought out information from all relevant sources, conducting interviews with, and distributing tailored questionnaires to, stake-holders from across the organisation – both SHERQ insiders and their colleagues from the wider business. Secondly, we distilled this research into content for a facilitated workshop at which issues were tabled and attendees discussed possible resolutions and future plans.

Using this process and our own existing knowledge of the sector, we formulated a number of recommendations. Some of these concerned structural issues, whilst some more left-field observations related to the internal marketing of the functioning (SHERQ itself, we discovered, was proving to be a rather unmemorable acronym).

A comprehensive list of recommendations and suggestions included ideas about the culture of the division, how it should sit within the wider organisational framework, ideas as to how the best practice evident in its Africa based operations could be shared with other operations, and how the resources should be organised for the future, in terms of numbers of individuals required and desirable skills.



Leadership development in turbulent times

Our client had experienced rapid growth in a very short period of time. Its leadership team had a high level of technical excellence and now wanted to further develop good interpersonal skills with clients and employees.

Thism designed a bespoke progressive action based programme to meet a wide range of objectives, but principally to develop the skills and mindsets of the leadership team. Supportive coaching was provided to encourage self reflection, self belief and grounded planning for future improvement. Three key themes were developed: the leader within i.e. the development of self awareness; the leader in the team i.e. awareness of others in the leadership network and the wider organisation; the leader in action i.e. building an action agenda rooted in real work challenges.

Initial individual face to face meetings were conducted to gain understanding of needs and issues facing the team and a series of five workshops over six months were designed to reflect upon the principles and best practice of leadership. A major focus was to increase personal awareness of behaviour and how this impacted upon others. To this end a number of key skills were practiced and supportive tools made available.

Since the programme took place during a period of immense instability within the global market it was possible to build in flexibility to the programme to meet and support the changing needs of the individual and the leadership team; Thism is a responsive organisation who can adapt readily to needs of the client. The series of workshops afforded a real opportunity for leaders to discuss the business issues of the day, determine and share their own response and commitment to their evolving leadership agenda and build their own relationships as a leadership team.