



The Reassurance Network

Handing over: transitioning leadership for future success in a founder-led organisation

Background

The Reassurance Network (TRN) provides businesses with supply chain auditing services, thought leadership in human rights and bespoke ESG solutions. Established in 2003 by its founder MD Malcolm Guy, The Reassurance Network was one of the first dedicated consultancies to provide assurance to leading organisations including aerospace, utilities and retail before specialising in responsible supply chains.

The company has grown steadily into a team of worldwide associates who undertake specialist and often challenging and sensitive work investigating supply chains on behalf of high-profile brands. TRN offers its clients something quite unique, an approach radically different to other consultancies in the field. Associates have the freedom to work outside of conventional methods, supported by an organisational culture which is supportive, flexible and offers pastoral care; TRN's people describe their culture as family-like.

The sticky problem of founder handover

When TRN approached Roffey Park, MD Malcolm Guy had made a firm decision to step back from the business into retirement and, rather than recruit externally, he was keen to develop a succession plan from within. One of the overriding aims was to preserve the special culture of the organisation, and at the same time there were talented leaders operating across the globe whom he saw as an exceptional leadership team for the future.

Five leaders were identified as the future team of directors who would drive the business forward, but there would need to be a shift from the usual operational focus to help them to evolve into a cohesive team of effective strategic leaders.

So, the vision and aims were clear. However, founder-successor transitions can present specific dynamics and need to be planned and executed with care. Key to this is a willingness to let go - seen as the most important determining factor of successful transition - coupled with preparation and readiness of the successor. Further, a founder-led organisation can characteristically encounter greater complexity in handover due to the emotional and psychological aspects in play.

It became clear that some support from an expert learning partner to create the ideal conditions for transition would be part of the evolution.



It's hard to describe what our uniqueness is. I still can't do it. We needed a partner who would recognise that.

Here's someone who has taken the time to get to know us. And that was impressive.

Malcolm Guy, MD

Getting the partnership right

Achieving the shift from being an operational leader into a strategic leader of diverse, remote teams requires adaptability, empathy and emotional intelligence as much as technical expertise. As the chosen partner, Roffey Park would quickly need to get under the skin of TRN, demonstrate a deep understanding of the complexities and sensitivities of their work and additionally, bring commercial expertise.

One of Roffey Park's core principles is to ensure that we fully understand the issues and current context of our clients, and we do this through comprehensive diagnostic work. For TRN, it was also critical that the culture of the organisation was not diluted or lost, and so our close collaboration in the early stages also meant we could grasp the culture and style which we needed to model in our work together.

It also felt important to bring in a provider who was new to TRN, providing a fresh set of eyes.



When I came to Roffey Park recently, I picked up a paper called Leading with Love. I was attracted by that. It summed up how we manage, and how we work with vulnerable workers in supply chains.

Plus, the history of Roffey Park, it was set up as a safe place, for people to recharge so they could thrive in the workplace. I felt a huge alignment of our organisations - values, purpose and unconventionality.

Malcolm Guy, MD

The Programme

One to one sessions

Before embarking on the planned leadership development work, it was agreed that some individual work would be beneficial for the team. Malcolm's own one to one work with Roffey Park's Head of Consulting Emma Du Parc had been hugely impactful and he was keen for others to have the same experience,

"...this mattered a lot, I wanted others to experience the same thing. I had hugely felt the benefit of a face-to-face conversation. I had learned a lot about myself, it had helped me set some goals and figure out what we were trying to achieve." Malcolm Guy, MD

The purpose of the one-to-one coaching-style sessions were to explore some individual self-awareness, communication styles and to look at team dynamics from the view of the individual leader. By creating an environment of psychological safety, Emma was able to offer both support and robust challenge which laid a secure foundation for the curiosity and openness the team would need for brave conversations with each other, so that the work could begin.

"Most importantly, our time there created a space to be transparent and open with our feelings and opinions. Exploring paths that might feel difficult, challenging or overwhelming. That has been pivotal in allowing us to move forward as a team." Senior Leader

The Leadership Workshop

In September 2025, the team flew in from TRN's global locations to convene at Roffey Park for a three-day leadership programme.

With each leader bringing different perspectives, cultures, languages and beliefs, and rarely being physically together, it was vitally important that the workshop offered a safe space coupled with expert facilitation to kick-start the transition from a diverse group of talented individuals into a cohesive leadership team.

The co-created workshop included real-life scenarios, tailored to the needs and specific context of the organisation. These were developed to really challenge the team, clarifying any areas for development or gaps in business operations. In addition, guided by Emma the group adopted development tools such as a 'Manual of Me' to improve communication, clarify roles and create a supportive working environment.

We often have the experience when we are faced with what looks like a challenge to our original plan of action, where we need to deviate from that plan. Roffey Park facilitators tend to surface and encourage this, and so when some unexpected challenges arose in the group, it became clear that the new team needed some time independently from their MD to help build cohesion between them. That meant that some of the planned activities were de-prioritised to make space for open conversations that needed to be had.

Acknowledging the need to change course in service of the new Senior Leadership Team as a whole was in some ways a reflection of the transition from Founder-Leader to "The Leadership Five", as the new team came to call themselves.

An environment conducive to deep learning

An essential component of achieving successful and sustainable outcomes for all is creating an environment where all participants feel valued, respected and supported, and the physical environment can play a key part.

The decision to bring the team together face-to-face was a significant one, with logistical complexities and financial implications, but it was felt to be wholly necessary to foster greater understanding and collaboration. Quite simply, what was needed was a safe space to be together where everyone felt comfortable to express their opinions, bring their authentic selves and perhaps take some risks.

“Roffey Park was the perfect physical environment to zone in to and switch off from the outside world, being in nature and working with an organisation that understands the healing impact of the outdoors set the tone for time spent there.” Senior Leader

Bringing people together to learn through dialogue and activity-based experiences has been far more powerful than anticipated. It was commonly felt that time spent together had enabled a deeper sense of trust, understanding and mutual support.



Roffey Park's UK venue in Horsham, West Sussex

Impacts and outcomes



“Looking back now, the work at Roffey laid a solid foundation for the relationships among the six of us, although it was not perfect in the moment, it built the establishment of trust, the division of work, and our alignment for what's to come” Senior Leader

The Reassurance Network's new Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is drawn from an international community of experts which is hugely diverse. With this comes a wonderful array of beliefs, working styles and communication preferences. Feedback conversations confirm that a significant impact of the leadership workshop was to raise self-awareness and understanding among the SLT so that these differences could be embraced, celebrated and drawn upon to shape the future of the business.

Four months later, the whole team again met face to face, this time in Bucharest. As well as celebrating a milestone birthday for one of the team, a priority was to pick up the key pieces of unfinished tasks which had originally been sidelined, something that proved easier now that there had been time to process and reflect.

Included was some specialist financial management training, further work on defining roles and responsibilities and re-visiting the communications style task, the *'Manual of Me'*. The team noted how much had changed in the intervening months, and how their communication styles were adapting. There is now an agreement that this task is dynamic and 'ingrained' and will be re-visited every quarter.

Other key outcomes include:

It's business as usual. The organisation continues to operate smoothly, with changes happening through gradual evolution. The new, highly diverse SLT have developed a deeper mutual understanding and self-awareness, enabling difference to be embraced rather than create friction.

Values are being actively applied in decision-making. The team remain highly focused on the mission and purpose of TRN; they are fully empowered to protect the disruptive, unconventional culture of the organisation while supporting each other effectively.

Financial management goes from strength to strength. Since the team have taken the reins revenue has increased by 10%, halfway to the target increase. As a follow up to the workshop, they have undertaken specialist financial training which is now supporting increasingly strategic financial decision-making. Costs are being carefully managed with greater efficiency.

Business Development is thriving. With the team now on the front-foot demonstrating increased confidence in re-negotiating contracts and commercial expertise, proactive engagement with clients has been boosted.

And there's less operational involvement from the Managing Director. As an operational and emotional shift takes place, there is increased self-reliance among the SLT. Leadership of the global business has stepped up, with the Directors for Europe and China taking greater responsibility in regional matters.

The decreased level of involvement from Malcolm has accelerated the development of the new Senior leadership Team, as he comments, *"I recognised this before, now I feel it"*.

The Reassurance Network

For over 20 years, The Reassurance Network's global team of experts has been providing clients with world-class supply chain auditing services, unparalleled human rights thought leadership and bespoke ESG solutions and reporting.

