

# CASE STUDY

## EDF Energy strengthens HR Business Partners with Roffey Park

EDF Energy is one of the UK's largest energy companies and its largest producer of low-carbon electricity. A wholly-owned subsidiary of the EDF Group, one of Europe's largest energy groups, it generates around one fifth of the UK's electricity and employs around 15,000 people. The company supplies electricity and gas to around 5.5 million residential and business customers, making it the biggest supplier of electricity by volume.

### The challenge

EDF Energy has grown both organically and through mergers and acquisitions of other companies such as SWEB, Seeboard, London Electricity and British Energy. As a result, it had a fragmented landscape whereby each entity had its own way of operating and its own vision.

In order to introduce more consistency and leverage economies of scale, the company introduced the Supporting Excellence initiative in 2010. This programme was designed to look at how EDF Energy could make the support functions within the business, including HR, more effective and cohesive.

"We weren't operating in a joined-up fashion which meant we weren't as effective for the business as we could be so we went through a reorganisation process to realign the HR function," explains Barbara Thurston, Leadership Development Manager at EDF Energy. "We implemented the Ulrich model for HR to help build a better structure and created HR Business Partner roles supported by Centres of Excellence. We also outsourced transactional activities to a shared service model across the business."

EDF Energy recognised that HR Business Partners were crucial to this transformation and that if this new role was not properly supported, the rest of the new model would fail. It therefore committed to investing in training and development to ensure the Business Partners were equipped with the right skills to thrive.

"We produced a draft outline of what the development programme might look like based on rigorous internal research," adds Thurston "We had an existing relationship with a development company and felt that while they understood

the need, they may not be able to deliver as cost effectively or credibly as other providers as HR was not an area of specialism."

A colleague had met with a representative from Roffey Park at an event and recommended Thurston approach it. Because Roffey Park already had a HR Business Partner Development programme in place, it was best placed to meet EDF Energy's objectives.

"Roffey Park had 80 per cent of the content already laid out which reduced the design costs considerably," continues Thurston. "Roffey Park is also one of the most respected and credible practitioners within the HR field so it was clearly the ideal partner for this venture."



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## The solution

EDF Energy ran two internal launch days for the new HR Business Partner role, giving Roffey Park the opportunity to visit and get a feel for what participants wanted from the training. This information was then fed into the three day programme that Roffey Park put together. The programme is designed to equip partners with the tools and skills needed to become an effective Business Partner, with each day focusing on one aspect of the role.

“We call it the head, heart and hands approach – day one is about understanding the model; day two looks at interpersonal skills and the final day explores practical elements,” comments Thurston. “It’s a very experiential process which is one of the aspects that initially attracted us, including workshops as well as real world case studies. This helps engage the participants.”

The three day core programme was augmented with four different elective modules on change, organisational development, consulting and workforce planning as well as a masterclass in HR Leadership for the most senior directors. In total, 95 people have taken the core programme, 95 have taken part in the elective modules and 29 people attended the One HR Leadership masterclass. For EDF, it was important that these took place at Roffey Park’s Sussex venue.

“The environment at Roffey Park is critical to the experience because it is immersive and conducive to learning; you really feel like you are getting away from the stress of the office,” says Thurston. “We have Business Partners coming from across the country – from a power station in Scotland to a call centre in Exeter – so to get them together in one place, leaving the office behind, helps the learning process.”

## The results

Following each cohort’s participation in the programme, Thurston and her team issued evaluation forms to measure the response and value. They also plan to interview six Business Managers to find out how well HR Business Partners have supported them following participation in the programme.

“The results speak for themselves: ‘course satisfaction’ rated an average of 5.1 out of 6 while ‘improved performance’ rated 4.9. That demonstrates the tangible impact the programme makes,” remarks Thurston. “We were told that the balance of classroom and practical content was perfect; that people had felt their confidence boosted and that the environment was ideal for reflection and self-awareness.”

Following the initial three days, Roffey Park ran reconnect days to bring participants back together to review the application of their learning and dig deeper into a subject of interest. Each of these days included a half day on Finance, which proved particularly popular. And as new employees join the HR community, EDF hopes to run another cohort later in the year.

“People have formed great networks and shared knowledge across disparate parts of the company as a result of the programme. There is also a far better understanding of what it means to be a HR Business Partner,” concludes Thurston. “Our focus now is on embedding the skills, knowledge and behaviours to create a more consistent, and effective service to the business.”



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