

CASE STUDY:

Team Coaching Helps LLWR Collaboration
Save Years – and Millions



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LLW Repository Ltd (LLWR) provide a range of waste management services to the UK nuclear sector including neighbours Sellafield and the wider nuclear estate.

Commencing in 2013, the legacy Plutonium Contaminated Materials (PCM) programme was tasked with decommissioning five 'magazines' – concrete bunker-like structures which were originally constructed during World War II to store munitions when the site was used as a Royal Ordnance factory.

Plutonium Contaminated Materials (PCM) from operations at the Sellafield site were later stored in the magazines before purpose-built and safer storage facilities were commissioned at Sellafield.

The £100million programme to decommission the five magazines on the LLWR Site was launched in 2013 and originally expected to take ten years, but the programme was completed with four years ahead of schedule and with a saving to the taxpayer of over £20million.

Lead contractor NSG Environmental Ltd (NSG) headed-up a wider team that included Nuvia, PC Richardson, Atkins, Hertel and Studsvik along with internal LLWR personnel.

However, the programme didn't get off to the best start as Gareth Wilson, NSG Project Manager, acknowledges: "The full-time relationship got off to a rocky start and initial progress was slow."

Integrated leadership to create high performing teams.

Acorn Coaching & Development were introduced to help the collaboration teams work cohesively and get the project on-track.

Acorn have over 25 years' experience working with teams in complex and challenging projects in the construction, infrastructure, engineering and nuclear sectors.

"From the outset, it was clear that creating and developing a wholly integrated leadership team was pivotal." says Keith Longney, Managing Director of Acorn Coaching.

"The PCM leadership team would need to appreciate all key functions in the programme and understand that project success required each partner to work in a fully interdependent manner. For this reason, supporting functions such as waste, safety case, conventional safety and radiological safety were included."

Project partners were also involved in authoring and committing to a 'behavioural charter' – a living document highlighting the expectations of all team members and which would prove to be a benchmark throughout the next six years.

"Establishing the leadership team and the charter were fundamental activities." adds Keith, "Once the leadership team had been established, they were able to focus on successful delivery and harness a 'solution-focused' mindset to explore the key issues, resilience to overcome challenges and proactively supporting one another. At times this meant working outside the bounds of their functional role for the benefit of the overall project and being prepared to be challenged."

Bi-annual coaching sessions by Acorn provided a supportive environment to reflect and re-evaluate the team's achievements, both of the tasks it had set and the way they aligned with the behavioural charter.

Everyone informed. Everyone involved. Everyone on-board.

Although much of Acorn's focus was on the PCM leadership team, Keith is the first to acknowledge that success wasn't solely achieved by the people at the top.

Positive engagement with all involved in the programme, and actively managing them to drive project delivery, saw a real focus upon efficiency and the crucial desire to improve overall performance.

A number of collaboration workshops occurred at shift level to ensure productive team working.

"For it to be truly effective the leadership culture needed to be cascaded down and embedded within the delivery teams; project managers, supervisors and support functions. High levels of flexibility and autonomy were enabled and encouraged, with the knowledge and input directly assisting in refining the schedule on an ongoing basis and subsequently increasing project performance."

'Learning from Experience' was adopted throughout the programme with teams drawing directly on their experience of previous nuclear projects and wider industry sectors.

This approach started to show tangible progress within the first year and, when challenges from the NDA required an accelerated schedule, the foundations were firmly in place for the programme to run at the new pace.

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However, not everyone was immediately committed to the new programme ethos: “As one might expect, there were a few individuals who were not able or willing to fully embrace the expected step-up in behaviour.”

“There were occasions when, for the good of the programme, existing practices needed to be challenged, with appropriate support provided where necessary to keep everyone on-board.”

“We all know that a few ‘bad apples’ can significantly impact project performance - even by as much as 40% - and a step-up in behaviour was needed if the programme was to succeed. This would become even more apparent when the advanced schedule was introduced.”

NSG’s Gareth Wilson comments: “Teamwork has been integral to the PCM decommissioning programme’s success. This has been one of NSG’s biggest projects... and it’s certainly the best we’ve had in terms of contractor/client relationships.”

Safety first and foremost.

A flexible and dynamic safety case was a critical success factor from the outset and an achievement that rivals the time and financial savings is the programme’s safety performance.

The hazards facing operators working in the magazines were considerable, especially within high contamination C5 areas where air-fed suits had to be worn whilst working in confined and restricted working environments.

Getting an operator dressed in an air-fed suit typically takes 15 minutes, but that person was then dependent upon their colleagues to support them for the duration of their time at the work-face.

“All that high-hazardous work has been completed safely, over 400,000 man-hours at the work-face without a Lost Time Accident.” says Carl Smith, Programme Delivery Manager at LLWR.

Collaboration key to positive conclusion for PCM.

The latter stages of the PCM programme at LLWR have drawn high praise for all involved, with the positive collaborative culture resulting in the creation of these high performing teams.

The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority have a mission to deliver safe, sustainable and publicly acceptable solutions to the challenge of nuclear clean-up and waste management.” Concludes Keith Longney.

“Acorn are incredibly proud to have supported LLWR, NSG and the collaboration partners on the PCM journey and fully believe that, in this one programme, we have helped deliver the NDA’s objective.”

“Teamwork has been integral to the PCM Decommissioning Programme’s success.” says Gareth Wilson, “They [LLWR] have been nothing but positive. This has been a really good project with a large but close-knit team.”

“The programme has been a towering example of what can be achieved when a focused and determined group who really want to get a job done, adopt a collaborative approach.” Paul Pointon, Managing Director, LLWR

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Acorn Coaching & Development Ltd.
Wildman House
127 Highgate
Kendal LA9 4EN
UK

Telephone. +44 (0) 1539 741 511
Email. mail@acorncoaching.com
www.acorncoaching.com

