

# Alcon Case Study



## Customer Quote

*"Sewells have a proven ability to make a tangible difference. They have a partnering approach where the relationship is sustained outside the training room"*

**Alistair Fergusson, Managing Director  
Alcon Components Ltd**

## Overview:

Alcon are experts in the design, development & manufacture of specialist brakes & clutches. Their applications include motorsport, performance road cars, specialist defence, armoured protection and low-carbon vehicle sectors.

Following an initial culture change programme with Sewells in 2013, Alcon achieved steady growth in revenue (Going from £8m turnover with no profit, to a £28 million turnover and EBITDA of 20%), growth in the number of people (from 70 to 230) and growth in number of sites (including in USA).

As the business continued to expand into new markets and with new customers, Alistair Fergusson (Managing Director) felt there was a need to work on the right leadership skills at different levels within the business to effectively manage and cope with change ahead, improve communication, teamwork and performance management. Having previously experienced positive outcomes Alistair invited Sewells again to provide Leadership Training for their Leadership Team and Managers across the business.

## Highlights:

- A tangible improvement in employee culture which has had a direct impact on the business results and with suppliers saying "We want to congratulate you on your culture".
- A common set of leadership tools and language to help embed the learning.
- Created alignment, getting everyone to play their part to achieve clear collective goals.
- Created, developed and disseminated new purpose, vision, values and standards of behaviour.
- Launched the "Culture Club" an internal team focused on generating ideas and helping to implement the culture across the business.

## The challenge

Sewells started its journey with Alcon with 121 strictly private, confidential and structured diagnostic interviews to see what the true starting point was. This uncovered a number of challenges:-

- Communication was identified as the single biggest challenge, hindering collaboration between teams and exacerbating a lack of “one team spirit”.
- Change implementation was poor due to the lack of effective communication and team collaboration.
- The culture, although considered to have a good “family feel” was also described as “slow-moving” and sometimes “negative”.
- There was a limited understanding of the direction the business was heading across all teams, which was leading to inconsistency of execution.
- Leadership and people management skills were generally perceived as poor across the business.
- There was a feeling of disconnect between what the Senior Team believed was happening in the business and the real challenges being faced on a day-to-day operational basis.
- Siloed working and a lack of consistent communication between teams was leading to a lack of cohesion.

## The requirement

There was a strong requirement to upskill the existing Leadership Team, to develop leadership skills in effectively managing people and change, creating and role modelling the desired culture, communication, leading with purpose, delegating effectively and coaching others.

It was essential to provide a catalyst to unite them around an updated common purpose, vision, values, standards of behaviour and strategy that provided clarity and direction for change implementation and growth.

Obtaining buy-in was imperative, not just from those taking part in the training but across teams to provide team members with the motivation required to achieve continuous improvement.

## How we helped:

Alcon and Sewells entered a partnership to develop a clear direction and the business strategy for a 3-5 year horizon, by developing purpose, vision, values & standards of behaviour which were fit for purpose for where the business wanted to be.

The leadership teams developed their organisational capabilities, with targeted training sessions on topics such as mindset and attitude, leading change, communicating effectively and leadership and coaching, so that leaders and managers were able to ignite a passion and a sense of urgency in everyone they came into contact with.

This, in turn, created the right platform for leaders and managers to guide and support their teams effectively to make the changes required to support business growth and culture-based business improvement ... willingly!

The focus then shifted to cascade the direction, strategy, and business objectives to department and individual levels across the organisation so that there was consistent visibility and clarity for everyone.

Once this was in place, the next stage was to pull together as “one team Alcon” and get everyone bought into the culture change and defined standards of behaviour, this was driven internally by the select members of the Leadership Team, who created a coalition of individuals to drive change. Under the heading of “Programme Go-To” (derived from the company vision of “We are the go-to provider in every market we serve”) the guiding coalition promoted a programme of activities aimed at responding to the themes identified in the original diagnostic interviews and building the values that the wider management team had worked together to create.

Following the delivery of the initial programme, we measured some of the outcomes quantitatively and qualitatively by conducting 360 feedback exercises with the Senior Leadership Team and an Employee Engagement Survey across all UK sites.

As with any change programme, the challenge was about keeping it going. Out of the Programme Go-To team who were all managers, evolved Alcon's “Culture Club”, comprising people from all levels within the business, with the remit to drive the change and keep the momentum going. Membership tenure is for 12 months only, with people being replaced on a rolling basis to maximise the injection of fresh ideas and provide opportunity over time for as many as possible to be involved.

Post programme completion we have scheduled regular check-ins with the team to ensure they've stayed on track and we're delighted to say they're still reporting a sustained improvement.

## The results:

- A tangibly improved culture, Culture that you can really feel, commented on not only by leaders and their teams but also by suppliers noticing the improvement.
- Improved communication both vertically and horizontally in the business (still much more to do though).
- A greater sense of value amongst employees with numerous low cost, highly valued ‘little perks’ introduced and the launch of a Teammate Appreciation Programme in which people can be nominated by their peers for doing something extraordinary to support the team.
- Greater sense of belonging to something special with many new employees commenting in their early days that Alcon is a fantastic place to work with a strong ‘family feel’.

### Customer Quote

*"Sewells provides a more holistic approach to the whole culture and training process than other providers.*

*They take the time to understand what our business needs and have the people able to create the open relationships with our senior leadership."*

**Dr Andrew Smith, Engineering Director, Alcon Components Ltd**

## Ready to achieve similar results for your organisation?

Don't let another day go by with untapped potential in your team. Take the first step towards transformative change today.

Get in touch to find out more **01244 681 068** or **[tellmemore@sewells.com](mailto:tellmemore@sewells.com)**