

## TESTIMONY

# The "Behavior Champions" at Pfizer Ltd

Interview with **Philip WATTS**, customer marketing director, Pfizer Limited (UK)

*Pfizer Ltd, the UK branch of the American pharmaceutical company, has around 120 "behavior champions". They are the driving force behind cultural change, and work from within the company's field force – in all areas – to inspire a process of "viral change" in terms of the individual behavior that needs to be adopted to enhance performance. Everything began in 2005, in the sales department.*

The results of the annual employee review, which is carried out every autumn by Pfizer Ltd, were published in September 2005. "It's an assessment of the way in which we put our values into action", Mr Watts explains. Feedback from the sales force, of which he was then director, was mixed – the teams said they understood Pfizer Ltd's mission and their role in the company, but remained vague about the culture in the sales department. "The reps didn't really have a clear idea of exactly how they should behave with colleagues and customers", Mr Watts explains.

Philip Watts then met Leandro Herrero\*, who was working as a consultant in the company, and was very interested to hear his assessment of the situation: "Many organizations that want to establish a specific culture begin by describing it and then try out various action plans to implement it. On the contrary, the culture is a product of the behaviors that the team has succeeded in developing". So, how can companies identify and then implement these behaviors?

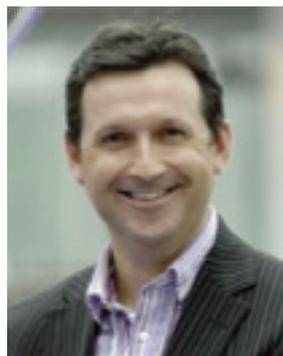
## Defining the new behavioral imperatives

At the beginning of 2006, Philip Watts began the process with three to four days of intensive brainstorming with his immediate reports: "We discussed all the important issues in our company – our environment and what it means to work at Pfizer, and so on". The results of these discussions were then condensed into four "key behavioral imperatives":

1. "Business results come first"
2. "Feedback and recognition"
3. "Keeping promises"
4. "Living a shared agenda with the customer"

"We realized that if we were able to implement these imperatives, we'd be able to develop the culture we need to make progress", Mr Watts explains.

## Biography



**Philip WATTS** graduated in zoology from the University of London, and is a biologist by profession. He began his career in the pharmaceutical industry in 1984, in the sales department at Pfizer Ltd, the UK subsidiary of the American pharmaceutical giant. Having been responsible for sales, he became the department's manager and then director in

2000. In 2006, Philip Watts was appointed customer marketing director at Pfizer Ltd. With 122,000 employees in 60 countries, Pfizer is the world's leading private investor in biomedical research and markets its drugs in more than 150 countries. Pfizer has been present in England since the 1950s, and has 6000 employees. After Pfizer's acquisition of Pharmacia, it became the country's largest pharmaceutical company in 2003.

## A new methodology: viral change

The four policies then needed to be translated into "clear and concrete actions" for the teams. This involved deciding which methodology to use to explain the importance of these behavioral imperatives and promote them in the sales department. The task force took two major decisions:

1. To implement the four imperatives sequentially to avoid burdening the employees with too much change at any one time.
2. To avoid traditional channels of communication whereby, following the initial briefing by Philip Watts' leadership ●●

... team, the directives would be passed down to the respective leaders, the managers, and then the sales reps. The behavioral imperatives were going to be implemented in a more ad hoc way – by "behavior champions". This is how the process of viral change would be set in motion.

### The "Behavior Champions"

In the spring of 2006, Philip Watts held a meeting with twenty or so senior sales managers to explain the methods that had been chosen and obtain their support. A discussion then followed about the profile of these "champions". Ideally, they would have a large network of contacts, be able to sell their ideas, have all the right experience, and be respected by their colleagues. "I asked the managers to send me a list of people they thought matched this description. To my great surprise, each manager immediately made a note of two or three people and I received a list of sixty people, 95% of whom were sales reps in the field".

Philip Watts then held a meeting with the people whose names had been put forward to explain the project, its stage of development, and tell them that he needed their help to implement it step by step. "But, there was no question of making them feel like they were the "voicepiece" of management. They had the choice to accept or refuse to take part in the project. We also told them about the special conditions that would make the task easier – unlimited mobile phone calls to their colleagues, the possibility of covering the costs of any future informal working sessions, and so on". At the end of the meeting, all the people present agreed to take part in the project.

Their mandate:

- To describe in detail what "business results come first" actually means in terms of behaviors in the field.

- Once identified, to discuss the necessary behaviors with all those around them – their colleagues and managers. "They collected success stories from people who began to take a different approach in an attempt to spread the message that "business results take precedence over everything else", Philip Watts explains. "As these stories have spread, they've become part of the company folklore and, after only a month, many people have integrated this new language into their daily working lives. Starting with only 66 people, we've been able to "infect" all the sales forces and, soon afterwards, the whole company".

### The whole company took these steps

This pilot scheme was adopted throughout Pfizer Limited to introduce an entirely new corporate culture. Pfizer Limited has just undergone a major transformation after a restructuring programme. "We had to make tough decisions. In the United Kingdom we had to transform our entire structure and processes. Changing behaviors has facilitated the management of this transformation, enabled it to work in the long term, and become an integral part of the organization".

There are around 120 "behavioral champions" spread throughout the company. The concept is the same – it involves defining behaviors identified by the management, promoting these behaviors and introducing the teams to a new culture". We didn't want an operation that's only effective in the short term. Today, 18 months after the launch of this operation, our champions are still here –motivated, involved, and very positive", concludes Philip Watts. ■

\* Author of *Viral Change*, see the summary of the book on p. 3.

## What lessons has Philip Watts learnt from this experience?

- The people we approached were committed in their involvement. When their director gave them a direct mission, they understood that we were placing our trust in them and that top management was directly involved. This sponsorship is a vital component in the operation's success and more specifically in motivating the "champions".
- We opted for a viral communication process based on storytelling rather than through PowerPoint slides. The exchange is far more effective, because the Participant understands what needs to be done to adopt the new behavior.
- There was no detailed roadmap or specific tools, and everyone was free to choose their modus operandi. They could organise meetings, invite people to take part in impromptu discussions in the cafeteria, conduct telephone interviews, and so on. This point is particularly important: you must not over-formalize the process.
- Lastly, we made a mistake by only briefing the "champions". On the ground, certain people felt hampered by line managers, who felt excluded. If I could change something, I would involve them to a greater degree, explain our objectives, and why we were pursuing them.