

Bridges: redefining company culture using FIR best practice

Background

With its head office in Somerset, Bridges is a Mechanical and Electrical Engineering company which designs and delivers projects for the Water and Energy Sectors across central and southern England and Wales. The business has enjoyed organic growth and now has a turnover of £25m and directly employs over 200 people. Founded by the Bridges family, and currently headed up by Managing Director Matthew Bridges, family is of great importance to the organisation. The leadership put great emphasis on being approachable, relatable and ensuring that Bridges as a 'listening organisation' which creates a friendly culture and a personal touch. As part of the personal touch, staff members are able to be themselves at work and find opportunities that suit them in the workplace. Such opportunity for mobility is reflected in the fact that a number of the directors within the organisation first came through the Bridges' doors as apprentice and within the trades; and several staff members have been with the organisation for 20 years.



Why Address Fairness, Inclusion and Respect (FIR)?

- "Fairness Inclusion and Respect is about making everyone feel that they are a key part of the company. Our whole operating ethos is around teams. We specialise in delivering engineering projects, our success is wholly reliant on effective teamwork. FIR and diversity bring real business benefits, particularly around innovation. To keep our competitive edge we need to keep challenging and being creative, diversity in our teams is key to this" Chris Maddox Framework Director (FIR Champion)
- As a Small Medium Enterprise, embedding FIR within the company culture is at the heart of Bridges. Whether through positive interactions with their staff or local community, Bridges are passionate about creating an environment where they are making a difference. With 200 staff in the organisation, Bridges is a Small Medium Enterprise that needs to create a positive working environment which celebrates the individual as well as the company.

What has Bridges done?

Inductions

- Inductions are a crucial part of the joining and onboarding experience at a new organisation. At Bridges, directors play a role in welcoming new joiners to the business, as another way to break down barriers and create a friendly culture.
- As part of the induction process, new hires are allocated a buddy. The buddying system has also proven invaluable in providing a positive joining experience for new starters.

Staff Engagement

- With a desire to diversify the thought within the organisation and ensure others have the opportunity to contribute to the conversation, Bridges regularly engage staff through a culture of feedback.
- Following one of their staff engagement surveys, the decision was made to start quarterly forums to hear the views of staff and engage in a process of continuous improvement.
- Bridges also run 'values sessions' where the Directors reinforce the importance of Values and how pivotal they are in determining our culture.
- Bridges also have a wellbeing action plan and run monthly campaigns with specific focuses on topics such as mental health.
- Bridges initiated the '112 safety incident' process which gives staff 1 hour to verbally report a safety incident; 1 day to formally report it; and 2 weeks to close it.
- For those who do not have access to their computers on a regular basis such as site-based staff, Bridges have



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installed communication screens to allow everyone to see the communications being sent out.

- Bridges run a variety of social events to further foster engagement and to recognise and celebrate staff. These include a 'family fun day' where 100 people attended the 2018 fun day; a summer BBQ; go-karting trip; and Christmas party.
- To continue to build a community and provide staff with adequate social interaction and support whilst spending nights away from home on projects, Bridges has rented company houses which are used for site staff to stay in whilst working away. There is also emphasis on reducing travel and recruit from the locality.
- Bridges recognise the value of appraisals and ensures that all staff receive one, as well as conducting a training needs analysis across the business to ensure they are bridging their internal skills gaps.



Industry Wide Partnerships

- Bridges are focused on their local community and wider society. Through partnerships with organisations such as the Supply Chain Sustainability School, the 5% club, youth offenders organisations, Dragonfly Education Trust, and other organisations and charities include Weston Hospice, Forever Friends Appeal, and WaterAid, Bridges are able to have a positive impact through interactions with more diverse groups.
- Bridges are involved in ex-offenders programmes offering job, support, development and work experience opportunities.
- Bridges has also signed the Armed Forces Covenant to make a commitment to recruiting service personnel
- Bridges has a FIR Ambassador, Chris Maddox who continues to develop strategies and raise awareness across the industry on the importance of FIR



Closing the skills gap with Bridges training school

As part of the efforts to address the skills shortage and equip people with the necessary skills needed to work and grow in the built environment, Bridges has made significant investment in the developing of a training school that provides structured development training programmes for apprentices; degree level apprentices; graduates; HNCs / degrees. The training school opened in July 2017 and is dedicated to the hands-on development of apprentices training to become electricians.



The training school provides a safe environment for apprentices to practice the trade and develop their practical skills in. For example, they can learn and practice safe electrical isolations in a controlled environment, as well as pressure testing through the custom-built rig that is used to teach apprentices how to safely test and build up pressure in a blast proof area. The benefit to the organisation extends far beyond apprentices as the training school is also used to check the competencies of new joiners and to re-engage people who have been out of work. The pilot started small with just a few apprentices going through the school, in 2019 Bridges have 17 Apprentices including degree level apprenticeships now taking place. Bridges have achieved a 100% success rate with the training school as the apprentices and transition into the organisation.



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Work experience

Through the reach out programme, Bridges invites up to 5 career changers or people who have been out of work to spend five days with Bridges. Throughout the five days they have the opportunity to rotate across different parts of the school to learn about business and the core trades and produce products at their own work stations such as learning to assemble a unit; or learning about water treatment or sewage works. At the end of the five-day period, Bridges undertakes reviews and make offers of employment. Unfortunately not everyone can be taken forward. However, all the people on the scheme receive feedback, support with their interview skills, and a CV review with training to boost their employability and develop them to find roles within the industry as whole. Therefore the Bridges training school is not only of benefit to Bridges, but also to the individuals that take part, and the industry as a whole. Bridges is working towards becoming an AM2 assessment centre as a number of apprentices are already using the training school to practice for their AM2 qualification.



To feed the pipeline of interest and increase awareness of the industry, Bridges also take on eight students a year through four partner schools from the age of 14 years old to give them a taste of work within the industry and challenge negative perceptions. Bridges encourage all students to partake in this programme and recently had a student with special educational needs (SEN) take part.

Impact & Benefit Realised

- Bridges have embarked upon a number of FIR based initiatives and made investments into building a positive company culture and increasing workforce engagement and have seen a great number of benefits. Benefits include, but are not limited to:
 - Increase in employee engagement and satisfaction
 - Increase in the retention rates of apprentices
 - Sustainable growth
 - Broader client base
 - Growth of the in-house capability
 - Increase in project income based on their ability to offer a wider range of services
 - Increased understanding and alignment towards investment in tech such as VR and 3D modelling



Awards

In recognition of their initiatives and efforts, Bridges have won numerous awards:

- RoSPA gold medal in 2018
- Somerset Business Awards in 2017 (Skills for Growth Finalist and Innovation and Techno)
- Costain Blue Acknowledge – Exceptional Contribution Award in 2018
- Costain's Supply Chain Partner of The Year 2015 and 2016.



What does the future hold for Bridges?

As Bridges continues to invest in its people and capabilities, Bridges will:

- Be looking to spearhead a programme which seeks to take a mobile training unit on site to deliver a variety of training and host talks, demonstrations and deliver site based training.
- Build and launch Bridges Online (BOL) Intelligent business management system.
- Continue to develop more communications screens to better engage with staff
- Investing in Digital technology's supporting collaboration with internal and external stakeholders