



How GWK's Executive Team engaged, inspired and led through change

Success Story

CreateConsulting 

Business overview

[GWK Ltd](#) is a significant player in South African agribusiness, offering a range of services from agricultural supplies to farm foods, product trading and financial services. With its mission to sustain communities in agriculture, particularly in the Northern Cape, GWK lives by the purpose of **"feeding the people who feed the people"**.

However, even as a prominent leader in the sector, GWK encountered tough times in 2017. The company faced serious challenges and had to rethink some of their strategies. This involved the restructuring of 54 diverse business units which needed consolidation and focus.

At this pivotal moment, GWK embarked on a journey to redefine its leadership landscape. The company wanted to achieve world-class leadership, foster strategic focus among leaders and create a new roadmap for the future. This vision included building a highly effective leadership team, stimulating critical thinking and creating a culture where challenging conversations, commitment, caring and bravery thrived.

During this time, Llewellyn Brooks was appointed as the Group Managing Director (MD). His primary role was to stabilise the company and develop a new plan to get GWK back on track. The aim was to create an agile environment that encouraged courageous decision-making, emphasised compassion and promoted a focus on people.

The new leadership team had big dreams to take the company to the next level. Their goal was to boost the team's energy and commitment, reshaping GWK to stand out in the sector. This required building resilience and the ability to turn challenges into opportunities. Key to strengthening their leadership was the adoption of vulnerability, fearless progress, ownership and trust-building.

Through the implementation of specific tools, the team collaborated to enhance internal relationships, thereby transferring energy directly into tangible results.



"I was appointed as Group MD during a challenging time for the business. We needed to address the challenging issues and set a new direction. To do this, we had to adopt a new strategy and build a highly efficient Exco team."

- Llewellyn Brooks,
Group Managing Director

Getting the business back on track

Llewellyn knew he needed an aligned and cohesive leadership team to get the business back on track. He believed in the power of a team united in purpose, where members have each other's backs.

"With significant changes to the strategy, the goal was to get the team together and equip them for the journey ahead. It was also to give us tools and show us how we could rely on, push and motivate each other so that we could take everybody with us on the journey," said Llewellyn.

The key objectives were to:



Cultivate deeper levels of mutual respect and trust among team members, enabling them to become the best leaders for their individual divisions and for GWK as a whole.



Equip the team with effective techniques and tools, enhancing their capacity to navigate the complexities and pressures associated with managing a multifaceted agricultural business.



Facilitate learning from one another and gain a comprehensive understanding of each other's roles, leveraging individual strengths to enhance team synergy.

The burning issues

[CreateConsulting's](#) partnership with GWK began in 2018, focusing initially on strengthening trust within the Executive Team. This groundwork was vital for the in-depth leadership development that followed.

As our journey with GWK progressed, we were ideally positioned to provide ongoing support to the leadership team in leading through change and innovation. The strong foundation of trust that was already established was a key element in helping the team successfully navigate the complexities of the strategy they embarked on.

Throughout this period, the team faced several hurdles:



Team Alignment: Each director managed their respective business, resulting in a need for unity, collaboration and teamwork.



Managing Complexity: A restructuring from 54 to 33 business units was initiated to refocus on the core business.



Building resilience: Various factors such as fluctuating market prices, climate change, the pandemic (2020) and land reform added layers of complexity to the operation.

The Outcome

A cohesive, aligned and high-trust team, capable of leading tremendous change in a VUCA environment.

A change readiness journey

Llewellyn's strategy aligned with Patrick Lencioni's core belief that a healthy, competitive organisation starts with a cohesive leadership team.

Using Patrick Lencioni's '5 Dysfunctions of a Team' Model and [various other tools](#), CreateConsulting designed a custom team readiness journey for GWK's Executive Team. Regular meetings with Llewellyn ensured the journey met the team's and business's evolving needs.



** For more information on CreateConsulting's methodologies, processes and tools, [click here for the index](#)*

"If you get all the people in an organisation rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time."

Patrick Lencioni, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

1 Strengthening Trust

Patrick Lencioni's Model suggests that trust issues often arise when team members are reluctant to show vulnerability and acknowledge their mistakes, weaknesses, or need for help. He argues that a cohesive team is built on trust, engages in constructive conflict, commits to decisions, holds members accountable and focuses on collective results.

The first step towards strengthening trust within the GWK team was to create a safe space for open and honest conversations. This involved an in-depth exploration of the conditions that encourage optimal thinking and the use of practical techniques to establish a Thinking Environment™.

Reflecting on this crucial phase, Llewellyn highlighted:

"Mel was instrumental in enhancing an atmosphere of trust where we could be completely transparent. Patrick Lencioni's model, which emphasises vulnerability, was a game-changer. It encouraged us to show our true selves, not just the external front we often present. This approach really deepened our understanding of people. Through this, trust deepened and we gained a genuine appreciation and respect for each other's value and contribution."



2 Managing Conflict

According to Lencioni, avoiding conflict in favour of false harmony can stifle productive discussions within a team. When trust is missing, teams struggle to engage in honest, unfiltered debates which can lead to back channel communication and poor decision-making.

To sharpen their conflict management skills, the team was introduced to a few powerful communication tools. This encouraged open and direct conversations, creating an environment where robust dialogue was not just accepted but valued.

Guided by the [Thinking Environment™ methodology](#), these discussions remained constructive and respectful, ensuring every person felt valued and heard. Speaking to the effectiveness this approach, Llewellyn said:

"It was essential to establish a space where everyone had a voice and felt included. The tools Mel shared allowed for idea sharing, and even disagreements, all in the interest of finding the best solutions together. One key tool for us was Clean Talk. This structured and non-emotive way of communicating helped us move forward."



3 Keeping Commitments

Under Lencioni's Model, it's understood that a lack of clarity or buy-in can prevent teams from making decisions they will stick to. Without constructive conflict, it is difficult for team members to commit to decisions, creating an environment where ambiguity prevails.

Central to GWK's leadership journey was the mutual recognition of each team member's contribution. This realisation marked a significant milestone. By delving deeper into conversations, sharing insights and gaining a thorough understanding of each other's expectations, roles and contributions, a newfound appreciation blossomed.

As they journeyed together, the team experienced a growth in joint ownership of the company's results. Initially, the main focus was on their separate business units, but through deepened cohesion, their shared responsibility for GWK's success was strengthened.

Crafting a Whole Brain® purpose statement was an enlightening exercise. Through continuous alignment and efforts to build cohesion, the team worked towards a unified vision.



"This was largely due to the team 'meeting their commitments', a core principle from Lencioni's Model," says Melanie. "A critical component of this is role clarity, ensuring everyone understands their responsibility and contribution to the big picture. By the end, ambiguity was eliminated as the team solidified clear contracts, achieving full alignment on goals and strategies."

4 Driving Accountability

Lencioni's Model further highlights that avoiding interpersonal discomfort can lead to a lack of accountability within teams. When teams don't commit to a clear plan, even the most focused and driven individuals hesitate to call their peers on actions and behaviours that are counterproductive to the overall good of the team.

Accountability was a significant theme for GWK, emphasising the importance of owning responsibilities within individual business units.

Reflecting on this aspect of leadership, Llewellyn shared his approach and the impact it had on the organisation.

"We tried to lead by example, showing how to positively embrace feedback. This process wasn't just about giving constructive criticism; it involved sharing insights, appreciation and clear expectations. As we navigated the pandemic and the big changes in our business, it became clear that taking ownership was important for our success. Our commitment to each other's growth and the progress of GWK ensured that we not only weathered the storm but emerged stronger and more united as a team."

Melanie, too, received ongoing feedback about the positive shifts seen in Llewellyn's leadership and in the team.

5 Attention to Results

In a team, the pursuit of individual goals - be it for ego, career advancement, or recognition - can often overshadow collective success. This imbalance usually occurs when team members are not held accountable, leading to a diminished focus on shared goals. According to Lencioni, when a team loses sight of the need for achievement, it's not just the teamwork that suffers; the entire business can be impacted.

GWK's focus and commitment to achieving their vision and shared goals led to significant improvements in the business's performance and health.

Llewellyn, shared his thoughts:

"Throughout our journey, we placed a strong emphasis on clear, committed decision-making. For instance, in reshaping our strategy, we made tough but necessary decisions, like restructuring our business units and diverting investments into areas with the highest growth potential. This not only aligned our team but also helped retain and attract talented employees. We could see the results in improved operational efficiency, increased employee satisfaction and a strengthened market position."



"Mel has the ability to bring energy, align and facilitate a process that makes a team - with individually strong opinions - stronger and more vulnerable. She assisted us in shaping a better functioning team built on trust."

- Andri Bezuidenhout,
former Finance Director

The Executive Team's top 10 outcomes

- Significant financial growth
- Strengthened market position
- Enhanced trust, collaboration and team cohesion
- Improved strategic thinking and streamlined decision-making
- Successful implementation of clear and structured strategies
- Enhanced operational efficiency
- More constructive and productive meetings and improved communication and problem-solving
- Employee satisfaction and a positive work culture
- Improved stakeholder relations
- Personal growth and development.

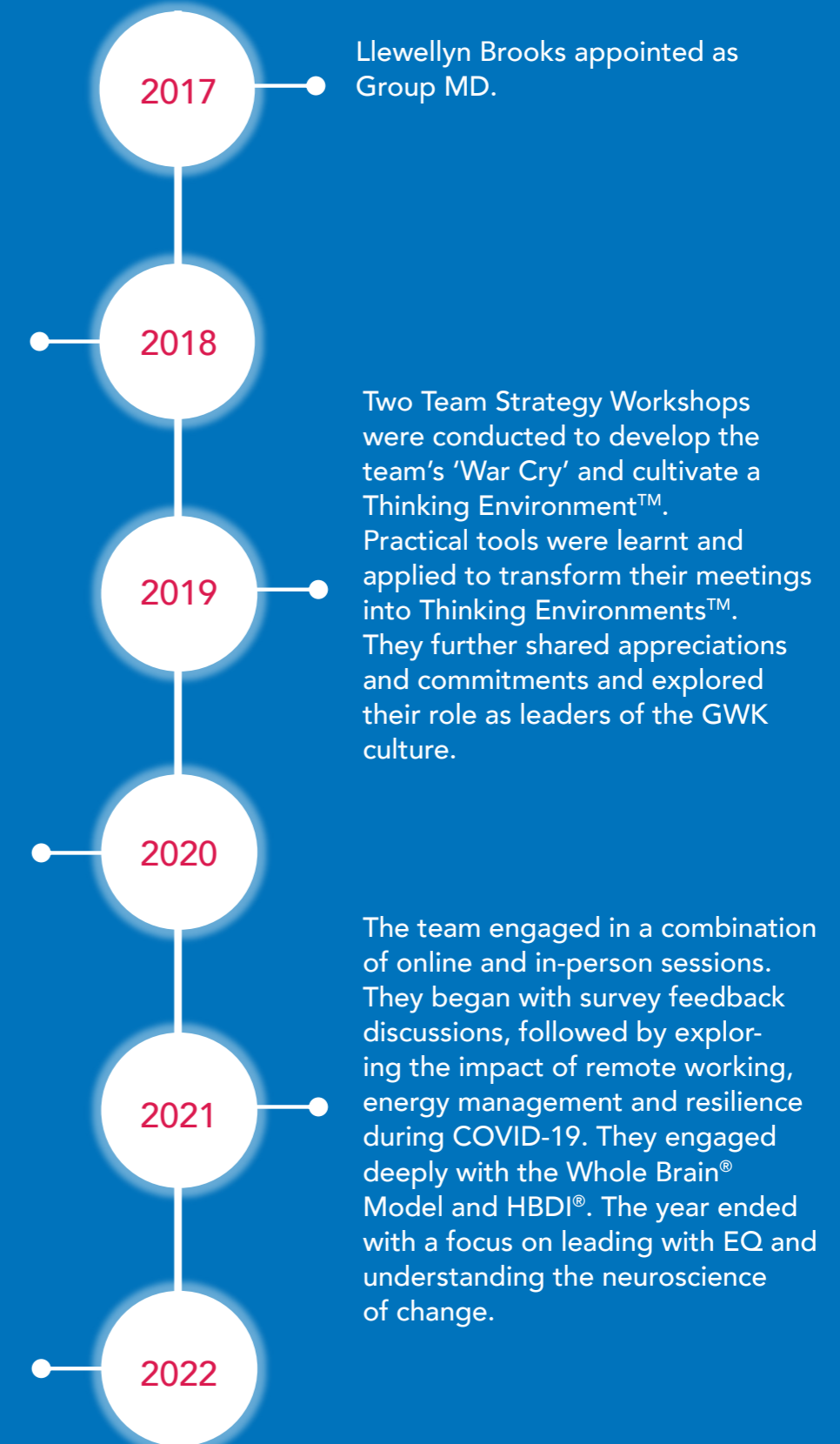
* These outcomes are the culmination of various factors, including the leadership journey, coupled with strategic, operational, and structural changes driven by the GWK Executive and Management teams.

Timeline of events

GWK's Executive Team embarked on a Team Alignment Workshop, focusing on establishing core aspirations, a future vision, good team dynamics and Whole Brain® Thinking.

One-on-one executive coaching provided a confidential space for individual growth and skill development. This was crucial in supporting each leader with personalised coaching to navigate the multifaceted challenges of their industry.

Focused on building connections and Stretch Partnerships. The year's agenda included defining the team's purpose and establishing accountability contracts. Emphasis was placed on commitments and resilience in leading change, all aimed at supporting individual growth, team work and leadership within GWK.



Conclusion

“Mel really took the time to get to know each of us and how we work together as a team. Understanding our ‘current state’ at the start was key to the success of the journey together. She tailored our sessions to guide us from where we were to where we wanted to be. Mel has an amazing ability to cut through the noise, find the real growth areas and address them in a non-intrusive way. Her commitment to our business was something special. There was almost a telepathy that developed as we both worked towards the ideal outcomes. I appreciated the deep trust, confidentiality and integrity she brought to the table.

CreateConsulting are all about people and they are 100% invested in your success. For any company looking to improve their team’s performance, I’d recommend them,” concludes Llewellyn.

Index of Tools

- [Whole Brain® Thinking](#)
- [HBDI® Individual Profiles, Pair Reports & Team Profiles](#)
- [The Thinking Environment™](#)
- [Clean Talk](#)
- [Coaching](#)
- [Herrmann® Team Effectiveness Dashboard](#)
- [Stretch Partnership Programme](#)
- [Leading Whole Brain® Change](#)
- [Power of Play](#)

Click the play icon to watch GWK’s Old MacDonald has a farm video.

It tells the story of how Frank’s passion for farming started, how he used technology to provide food to more people, and how GWK supports him every step of the way - like they do for every South African farmer.

I am, you are, we are Old MacDonald.



Connect with us today:

info@createconsulting.co.za

www.createconsulting.co.za

