

***Case Study: Staples – Corporate Express integration***

After a public offer, Staples Inc. acquired Corporate Express N.V. effective July 2008. In Europe this resulted in a major integration project of two Staples divisions with one Corporate Express division.

Jointly, these three divisions represented more than € 2.5 billion in revenue, and consisted of more than 40 Business Units across 17 European countries.

I was appointed to lead the Programme Management Office (PMO) of the European Integration. In this capacity, I reported to the President Europe and was a member of the European Leadership Team.

The PMO kept a detailed dashboard of all integration projects, measuring progress and stepping in to help deal with any arising issues. High-level progress reports were formally presented to the Staples CEO and other key executives on a regular basis.

The Integration PMO worked closely with the responsible business leaders to lay out the integration plans across the functions Merchandising (Buying), Indirect Buying, Supply Chain, Marketing (incl. eCommerce), Finance, IT and HR. For the purposes of the integration, Europe was divided into five regions, with Regional Heads responsible for managing and streamlining the business units in their respective regions, including a rationalization of locations, back office and call center functions.

In this highly complex environment of 5 Regional and 6 Functional heads, I led my PMO team to successfully develop the integration strategy, deal with cross functional dependencies, prioritize actions and monitor the progress thereof. For urgent projects in Italy and Spain, with loss-making business units, I convened all responsible leaders to kick start local integration projects. A multi-channel go-to-market strategy was developed for the combined European businesses, comprising retail, mail order, webshops and a sales force. A major restructuring plan was launched in May 2009 across all countries involved, to deal with the social consequences of the staff reduction. I was closely involved in the change management process.

Although the detailed integration plans were developed bottom-up, clear synergy targets were set top down by the Staples Board at the start of the integration. These were to be achieved predominantly in the areas of direct and indirect buying (vendor consolidation), supply chain (logistics optimization) and overhead reduction. By the end of 2009, 1½ years into the integration, these synergies had been significantly overachieved.