

# Case Stories

**A global alumina manufacturing organization with the performance of one of its oldest refineries. Safety was poor, performance never up to expectation and it was caught in a vicious cycle of unplanned stoppages**

## NAVIGATING COMPLEX CHANGE

### Situation

Over a 10-year period there had been a slow decline in the performance of a complex, aging alumina plant, where production targets were rarely achieved. The plant was increasingly unreliable, unstable, and there was an unacceptable rate of safety-related incidents.

The divide between management and workforce had increased and all were disillusioned. They had tried many things over the years but nothing seemed to work including improving infrastructure or processes and changing those in leadership positions - they could not break the vicious cycle in which they were all caught. Teamwork was patchy, people were burnt-out, suffering from extreme micro-management and brutal extreme command and control domination.

### Challenge

Whilst significant progress had been made to stabilize the group over the previous two years, the organization was desperate to reconceive its place in the world and develop a new strategy out of the crisis with a restored image, reputation and the confidence of the market.

In particular the global Executive group first required the Board's confidence so that they (and the banks) would support re-building the group.

Critical to going forward was achieving a significant immediate step change in operational performance and future work by both businesses.

### Our Approach

Dalmau Consulting partnered with a global corporate executive, and together with a small Change Leadership Team from the refinery, built a plan on these principles...

- > Change is built on, and around, real work
- > Provide skills, not knowledge, in how to lead and support humanely
- > Strengthen existing work groups and teams
- > Properly resourced yet simple
- > Use an iterative and emergent process; account for the reality of human need
- > Provide a transfer of know-how to the client
- > Change will not happen quickly – assume at least 18 months to 2 years

### Outcomes

This was not an “trumpets blaring” approach, but started with small actions. Momentum built over the first 12 months, and it was not without hiccups. At its core was a conversational process with all the right people in the room.

It is still a work in progress, and there are measurable indications of the change. Plant performance is far more stable than 2 years ago. Site-wide, real problem driven, team improvement based on both linear and non-linear methods has started, with a wider range of operational people. Business conversations are now engagement focussed rather than task information sharing, and have been well received.

Nearly all 100 or so teams have had conversations about how they are practically going to together work better and installed ways of holding themselves to account. Significant work is yet to commence on training and development of the various leadership cohorts.



*Beyond limits*