



# Wales Management Team Challenge 2003



Cyngor Rheolaeth Cymru  
Wales Management Council



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The Wales Management Council, P O Box 61, Cardiff CF24 5YE

Tel: 029 2045 0224 Fax: 029 2045 0231

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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

# A Challenge to Prove Your Calibre

The Wales Management Team Challenge, now in its second year, is the brainchild of the Wales Management Council and Trac, the training department of the enterprise agency, Antur Teifi.

Its aim is to give teams of ambitious, energetic and creative managers the opportunity to show just how good they are in competition with their peers from across the country.

More than that, it is designed to raise a banner for excellence, and provide a rallying point for those who believe that the quality of management and leadership in all sectors is the key to a prosperous future for Wales.

Not only is the event a showcase for managers with drive and ability, but it is an education in its own right. Scores of managers emerge from the annual exercise with valuable insights into their own attributes and those of their colleagues.

In the vast majority of cases, individuals and teams return to their places of work armed with new ideas and inspired to change things for the better:

Once again, the showpiece challenge, which is held at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells enjoys the support of Wales' post-16 learning organisation the National Council – ELWa and Wales' national newspaper, The Western Mail.

Building top quality management and leadership skills across Wales is a key part of ELWa's Corporate Strategy and Plan over the coming decade, while the Western Mail consistently promotes improved management performance by highlighting the successes of Wales best businesses.

Working with these and other partners, Wales Management Council will continue to be a standard bearer for better management and leadership. In particular we will be encouraging bodies who share these ideals to build upon the success to date of the annual Wales Management Team Challenge initiative.



# Aspiring to Excellence

The Wales Management Council, organiser of the Wales Management Team Challenge, is an employer-led body whose mission is to help managers lead and manage successfully.

As the demands on managers continue to grow, organisations need to ensure their executives have sufficient management and leadership skills to compete at the highest level.



Chairman Ian Rees said "Our vision is of a country where managers in all sectors have both the ambition and the ability to create and sustain businesses and organisations which are among the best in the UK.

"We exist because the quality of management and leadership in Wales will have a direct impact on our future growth, productivity and performance."

Through well-targeted and sustained communication, Wales Management Council aims to help change attitudes and build greater awareness of Wales' need to develop the full potential of its managers.

Mr Rees added: "Our aim is to achieve this vision through a new strategy for management and leadership development, working with all relevant public agencies, business organizations, and managers themselves."

The Wales Management Council has taken the lead in the development of a national strategy and action plan for management and leadership development. In promoting this strategy the Council works closely with partners such as The National Council – ELWa, the WDA, bodies representing business, and managers themselves.

The Wales Management Council strategy seeks to:

- Convince all managers of the benefits of developing their skills and abilities
- Identify, by thorough research, the real development needs of managers in Wales
- Ensure that managers can obtain high quality and flexible training and development
- Share best UK and international management practice among all businesses in Wales
- Measure progress against credible benchmarks

The Wales Management Council is funded largely by the Welsh Assembly Government and comprises some of the country's most senior figures from the public and private sectors.

# Keeping Business on “Trac”

The Council's partner in the showcase Wales Management Team Challenge is Trac, the training department of the enterprise agency Antur Teifi.

Trac provides training and development services to small and medium sized enterprises throughout Wales - delivering its services in English, Welsh or bi-lingually.

The body provides support for businesses in all sectors and is involved in European-backed projects to assist specific industries in rural Wales such as tourism.

While Trac's advice and support is available commercially in all parts of Wales, public funding to offset this cost is available in Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. Employers with up to 250 staff are eligible for such funding.

## Putting Talent to the Test - Creating a Worthy Challenge

Creating an event to surpass last year's successful launch of the challenge was no easy task, according to organisers Trac, the training department of enterprise agency Antur Teifi and competition designers, manzoku, the Brecon-based consultants whose name means “perfect learning.”

The challenge consisted of a series of innovative tasks intended to test the initiative, ingenuity, strengths and weaknesses of management teams.

Andy Cummings of manzoku explained: “We believe strongly in the power of adventure - the continuous learning derived from facing challenges - and in the capacity we all possess to learn through activity and role-play.”



The exercises didn't just demand that individuals and teams compete against each other. In order to mirror real life business situations, the tasks also challenged participants to identify the circumstances in which co-operation between teams would achieve a better result than outright rivalry.

Said Andy: "Human nature determines that under situations of intense pressure we compete rather than collaborate and we developed the tasks accordingly. Underlying behaviours were brought to the fore in a relatively short space of time and revealed much about the management style of the companies and individual managers chosen for this year's final."

The first element in the three-phase contest was designed to test the planning and negotiation skills of the teams.

Each was given locations to find within a specified time and each location pinpointed was assigned a nominal cash value. The objective was to collect the maximum amount of "cash" without incurring penalties.

How teams approached this exercise revealed their risk-taking and negotiation style. Those who were not risk-averse and possessed strong negotiation skills tended to score highest.

Phase two was a "production line" project in which teams completed a number of small tasks, each involving the transport of water. Teams were given a minimal amount of equipment and had to use their creativity and ingenuity to find an effective solution.

When presented with an unfamiliar environment, teams drew up a strategy based on what they could and could not realistically achieve. After an initial period most re-evaluated their position and changed strategy in the light of their experience.

Teams either collaborated throughout or assigned specific tasks to different individuals according to their strengths.

The final phase involved the scripting and production of a video advertisement to promote their organisation.

Mr Cummings said: "People reacted much as they would in business – defining their boundaries, devising and negotiating strategies, delegating responsibility and pulling rank if need be."

Through these activities managers and their colleagues were given a "snapshot" of their organisational, financial, leadership, people management and team-working attributes. All contestants kept a "learning log" to record the insights and new understanding they developed during the day. This was designed to become a valuable aide memoire, helping them to apply these crucial lessons back at their places of work.

By challenging pre-conceived ideas amazing results were achieved and many participants reported that they found they were capable of far more than they previously realised.

# The Challenge at a Glance

The Wales Management Challenge 2003 attracted 77 team entries from the public, private and voluntary sectors. This consisted of 12 entries from North Wales, 12 from Mid Wales, 23 from the South East and 29 from the South West.

First launched in 2002, its aim was to help raise awareness of the need for continuous management improvement in Wales while at the same time encouraging individual managers to boost their skills and performance.

Initial paper-based entries were short-listed by a panel comprising representatives of Wales Management Council, Trac, manzoku and Calsonic Kansei Europe plc. Thirty teams were chosen for the final.

This year's winners were selected through a three-phase event at the Royal Welsh Showground Buith Wells, comprising analytical and negotiation skills, problem solving and initiative and, finally, creativity.



Said Christopher Ward, Chief Executive of Wales Management Council: "These are all attributes that modern managers and leaders need to possess in abundance, given the challenges they face in an increasingly competitive business environment.

"Flexibility and the ability to respond effectively to the unexpected are of vital importance across all sectors. That is what the competition sought to bring out and we were very pleased with its success in doing so," he added.

# Bumper Crop of Executive Expertise - NFU

This year's top performers in the Management Team Challenge were drawn, not from among the captains of industry, but from Wales' agricultural community.

A determined four-man team from the National Farmers' Union (NFU) delivered an impressive display of co-operation and excellent communication to take this year's title.

With offices in Swansea, London and Brussels, the NFU works to secure a better future for Welsh Farmers and the wider rural community.



Team member, Hugh Richards, former President of the NFU in Wales said: "Naturally we were delighted to win and the Challenge did much to reassure us that our management team is of an exceptionally high calibre.

"Often the best way forward is not the easiest way, but we have to remain focused. As farmers we are dependent upon nature. Conscious of living in the real world, we need to be able to take real-world decisions and this means being able to stand firmly among our peers in the business world," he added.

The NFU team approached the challenge on the basis that one man's strength is another man's weakness. By combining their collective strengths and resources they were able to create a well balanced, winning team.

Mr. Richards said that the demands for business going forward are huge. "In order for us to be a successful business nation we need to focus on developing our own infrastructure without continually depending on businesses from elsewhere.

"In developing Welsh companies we need to further develop the skills of our management teams. The Challenge goes a long way in highlighting existing and underlying strengths while identifying future training needs."

# Charged with Getting Results - Dyfed Powys Police

Dyfed-Powys Police entered the Wales Management Challenge to test the skills of its Professional Standards Department and their ability to operate as a team.

The Carmarthen - based team discovered the tasks they faced in the competition were highly relevant to those they encounter in their everyday operations.

They quickly recognized the similarities and adapted so successfully to the different environment that they emerged as first runner-up in the keenly contested event.

Responsible for ensuring a reduction in complaints, a high standard of inspections, effective audits and overall integrity within the Police Force, the department views ethics as vital to the success of the organization.

Team member Chief Inspector, Ian John said: "Although we were of different ranks and don't work that closely together on a daily basis, we encountered no issues of authority when approaching any of the given tasks. We regarded the challenge as an opportunity to test ourselves against an industry benchmark and see how well we measured up."

During a day of physical and mental tasks, Ian and his colleagues, Alistair Lindsay, Claire John and Garth Richards used their patience to outsmart the competition.

He explained: "We relied heavily on our ability to perform tasks as a team. Our way of thinking is geared towards achieving results – no matter how small or how insurmountable the task seems at first. We delegated leadership to the team member with the best solution for the given task. Throughout we realised how important it was to have clear and strong communication channels in place."

Each member's contribution was valued and carefully assessed in order to decide the best strategy to proceed. Chief Inspector John added: "We are very task orientated within our organisation, but this did not stop us from having fun."



# Managing the Great Outdoors - Mount Severn Activity Centre

Mount Severn Activity Centre entered the Wales Management Team Challenge to sharpen the skills of its owner-managed team after buying the business two-and-a-half years ago.

Simon Hobbs and his parents Stuart and Sonia developed the Llanidloes-based centre into a thriving business employing 12 full and part-time staff through clever packaging of activities and an energetic marketing drive.

The centre, situated in 14 acres of woodland on the banks of the River Severn, caters for everything from school groups and families to group weekends and corporate team building. It attracts corporate clients from across the UK.

The family trio along with colleague Tim Griffin took what they learned from this exciting business venture into this year's Wales Management Team Challenge, emerging with the Second Runner-Up title.

Simon who played a key role in ensuring the team's success was extremely enthusiastic about the value of entering the Wales Management Team Challenge. "We found the Challenge useful in

many ways. During the exercises there wasn't enough time for everyone to read the brief so one person had to read it and give the others instructions.

"Although we focus on team building and management training at the Centre, I personally learned to give very clear and precise instructions when dealing with members of our team. I can take this skill back with me and pass on to others who visit the centre."



# Joining Forces for maximum impact - Abacus Team Cymru

One company keen to get the maximum benefit from the challenge was ABACUS Team Cymru from South Wales.

Four small enterprises: AJ Tensile Fabrications Ltd, Baines Consulting Ltd, Leadership Management (UK) Ltd. and Rubus Associates joined forces after meeting at a NGB2b business breakfast in Newport.

Micheline Baines from Baines Consulting in Tintern said: "We wanted to send a strong message to small businesses keen on developing their managerial and training skills. What inspired us most was that the challenge provided free training and required little time out the workplace.

"Within small businesses there are many opportunities to collaborate and form strong networks of complementary skills. By combining our organisational, tactical, practical and negotiation skills we were able to take on much larger and more established organisations."

Mrs Baines said the group gained some very valuable insights into their own characters and operational styles. "Overall we learned to be more assertive, go with the flow, have a disciplined approach and use our individual skills to our collective advantage."





## Reflections on an Intense Learning Experience

**Those who took part in the Challenge enjoyed some very real benefits as a result, according to post-event evaluation. A survey of participants found that no fewer than 71% had applied techniques they learned on the day when they returned to their businesses. More than six out of ten reported that they gained new business ideas and an impressive nine out of ten said they gained new ideas for developing staff. Literally everyone gave the event a thumbs-up as a good team building exercise. Ninety per cent rated it 'helpful' or 'very helpful' for teaching problem solving skills, while 95% gave it the same endorsement as an aid to communication skills.**

"We would really recommend the Challenge. Not only is it a good fun outing, but it allows you to test your team and yourself as an individual." **Hugh Richards, National Farmers Union**

"We viewed the challenge as an opportunity to test ourselves against an industry benchmark and see how well we measure up. The little nugget of gold that we take away from this event is that you should listen to your colleagues – no matter what their rank - and value their opinion. You are richer and better collectively for the experience." **Chief Inspector Ian John, Dyfed-Powys Police**

"We found it very useful in various ways. For example it taught me something about giving clearer instructions to other members of the team. We're glad we entered and would definitely do it again next year." **Simon Hobbs, Mount Severn Activity Centre**

"All were extremely delighted with the day's activities and what we got out of it. It was great fun. It pays to listen and by listening to others you'll learn more about yourselves." **Micheline Baines, Baines Consulting on behalf of Abacus team**

"It was absolutely brilliant. We learned a lot about each other during the day and realised we all had different skills." **Christine Bissex - BIZ.INC (Enterprise Arm of Merthyr College)**

"It was great. We all just mucked in together. We found that the trick is not to hang around but to get a plan together quickly and then get in quickly to put it into action. However everyone had their say in how things should be done." **John Fryatt - Senior Support Worker - Prestwood (Care Homes)**

"Our team had a fantastic time! They really enjoyed the day and would love to have a similar event for all our staff." **Glan-y-Mor School**

# Crossing The First Hurdle - Eliminator Round



*In order to gain a place in the final teams were asked to complete a three question eliminator. This exercise stimulated some very interesting responses:*

## Sample answers:

### Question One:

**What is the best piece of business advice you could give to organisations of your size in your industry or sector?**

It takes only one person to have an idea but many to turn that idea into a business proposition. Remember, to make a jigsaw puzzle all the pieces must fit.

Create space for management to think strategically, instead of reactively. Good strategies will need to be modified in light of events but will not be derailed.

Listen carefully to what existing and potential customers have to say but listen more carefully to what lost customers have to say.

### Question Two:

**What is the best training or development experience you have every had and why?**

Development that takes place in manageable chunks with constructive feedback that allows the learner to confidently apply the knowledge in real life.

Our quest for Investors in People enabled us to expose both our strengths and our weaknesses. The exercise focused us to develop an empowered communication system that involves all and team morale is high.

Peer mentoring, observation of others and sharing professional ideas through action rather than words.

### Question Three:

**What is the best piece of advice you could give your organisation?**

Have the courage to be visionary and innovative, value staff for what they do today and what they can offer tomorrow. Deliver excellence.

We should be confident enough to adopt new ideas without having to apologise. We should not justify change by rubbishing the past.

Do not sacrifice the long-term goals of the organisation in favour of short-term wins as this is the biggest cause of business failure.

# Finalists in the Wales Management Team Challenge 2003

ABACUS Team Cymru (Tintern)  
Abba Print Group (Groesfaen, Cardiff)  
Aberystwyth Arts Centre  
Atkins Management Consultants (Newport)  
BIZ.INC (Merthyr Tydfil)  
Celtica (Machynlleth)  
Cere Care Ltd (Lampeter)  
Croeso-Welcome Bangor  
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (Swansea)  
Dyfed Powys Police  
Dyffryn Taf School (Whitland)  
Glan-y-Mor School (Burry Port, Carmarthenshire)  
Heart of Wales Business Centre (Llandrindod Wells)  
Integrity Group Ltd (Cardiff)  
I-SA Assessment & Training Ltd (Bridgend)  
LBS LTD (Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire)  
Llanelli Jobcentre Plus  
Mentrau Iaith Myrddin (Carmarthenshire)  
Mid Wales Housing Association Ltd (Newtown)  
Mount Severn Activity Centre (Llanidloes, Powys)  
National Farmers Union (St Clears, Carmarthen)  
North Wales Fire Service  
Prestwood Residential Homes Ltd (Colwyn Bay)  
Private Sector Housing - Cardiff County Council  
Scott Tod Developments (Crickhowell, Powys)  
Stephens & George Limited (Merthyr Tydfil)  
The Complete Hospitality Company Ltd (Swansea)  
Trinity College Carmarthen  
Ymddiriedolaeth Nant Gwrtheyrn (Llithfaen, Gwynedd)

