

FOCUS  FIRST®

e-on

Realignment of an international
DAX40 Brand & Marketing Team



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With around 75,000 employees, DAX-listed E.ON SE is one of the world's largest privately owned electricity utilities. About 50 million customers in 15 countries make E.ON one of the most powerful operators of energy networks and energy-related infrastructure and a leading provider of innovative customer solutions.

With the acquisition of innogy in 2019, the energy group E.ON fundamentally reorganised its business and gained almost 37,000 new employees. One of Europe's largest energy companies was created with a turnover of 61 billion euros (2020). Integration of innogy and realignment of group marketing - in terms of content and organisation - were the tasks for the newly appointed E.ON CMO Axel Löber, who had previously transformed the brand of another DAX company at Merck. The challenges at E.ON were immense: high time pressure and ambitious goals set by the board. Insecure employees at innogy and E.ON. Lack of clarity about priorities due to several ongoing projects in different teams. Individual tensions and organisational inefficiencies. In this situation, E.ON decided to use the PEAK method to clearly align and accelerate the multitude of processes.

At the beginning of 2018, Germany's two largest energy companies, RWE and E.ON, agreed on a far-reaching swap deal that would permanently change the structure of the European energy market. A far-reaching reorganisation of the energy sector in Germany was thus signed and sealed. E.ON took over RWE's subsidiary innogy; in return, RWE received a stake in the E.ON Group and the renewable energy business of E.ON and innogy. As a result, E.ON went from being an integrated energy company to a distribution and customer solutions specialist.

It is common for companies to merge to increase their competitiveness in a bundled way. However, this can be very challenging internally - as was the case with E.ON when they brought together two marketing teams that brought different cultures and organisational structures with them.

The newly appointed Chief Marketing Officer of E.ON, Axel Löber, was faced with exactly this challenge at the beginning of 2019: How do you bring two marketing teams together and align them towards one goal, even though they come from different companies and cultures - and under high time and success pressure, as the brand and customer experience strategy of the newly formed company had to be restructured at the same time.

E.ON's corporate culture is characterised by a focus on performance and success. Innogy also placed great emphasis on relationship management. In addition, the takeover was not allowed to be completed for months due to antitrust regulations, and both teams could not work together during this time. The result: disagreements and conflicts about priorities and goals - combined with uncertainty about who should be taken over into the new team to be formed. And this was the case both

in the two group headquarters in Essen and internationally in the local sales companies. The bottom line was a concentration of complex problems that prevented the potential of the combined team from unfolding. The cultural unification of both teams and their joint orientation towards clear goals were therefore at the top of the agenda of the new organisation manager.

One of the biggest challenges was to develop this shared vision and goals:

„It was important that all employees understood how bringing the two teams together could lead to greater success for the company - combined with clear goals“,

Axel Löber emphasises.

Furthermore, ensuring that all team members were involved in the process and that their concerns and ideas were considered was essential.

In addition, there was a need to promote open communication. Employees should be enabled to freely express their thoughts and opinions without fear of rejection or consequences. Löber had to ensure that dialogues were as open as possible.

It was important for E.ON to use a procedure that, on the one hand, covers the individual needs for clarity immediately after the takeover while at the same time aligning the organisation in a structured and consistent way - quickly. This balance of clear structure in the process and a high degree of freedom in the content is crucial for successful transformation work. Especially at the beginning of the process, when many elements are still vague or unknown, there is otherwise a risk of getting bogged down.

Progress instead of just movement

The first step was to identify the most critical stakeholders' key expectations and requirements and incorporate them into the further transformation process. For this purpose, interviews were held right at the beginning with the key stakeholders who were decisive for the marketing organisation's success. The view from the outside and the involvement of the most critical stakeholders from day 1 is a core element of the PEAK method because the feedback and the early involvement of the most important stakeholders at the beginning only enable the acceleration in the further course. When stakeholders are actively involved in the change process, the implementation of change is usually easier and faster, as it is already aligned with the needs and requirements of those affected. Key stakeholders can also help communicate and drive the changes within their respective areas. In addition, working with key stakeholders promotes communication and mutual understanding and helps to strengthen relationships and build trust. This is particularly important in transformation processes, which often involve uncertainties and fears.

A conscious decision was made to conduct bilateral stakeholder interviews in a trusting atmosphere. Twenty-five people were interviewed in persona about the upcoming transformation. Although interviews require more time and effort than surveys, they are worthwhile in the context of a transformation and critical to success. There are three reasons for this: First, the knowledge of key stakeholders is the gold of any transformation. And in contrast to surveys, bilateral interviews can be much more in-depth. Secondly, key stakeholders should not only be interviewed but also activated. And thirdly, surveys distort. Often, socially desirable things are ticked off. In an interview, you can always ask questions again.

Target picture and roadmap for the overall organisation

Based on the feedback collected, a vision and roadmap for the entire organisation were created, which Axel Löber successfully presented to more than 200 stakeholders after his first 100 days in the new role. The new vision for E.ON Group Marketing inspired the team and stakeholders to take a long-term direction and provided a source of shared identity that visibly improved cross-team collaboration.

And it went further: once the North Star was proclaimed, the leadership team had higher decision-making confidence as they were strategically aligned around a shared vision and clear strategic goals. A simple, clear programme structure, flanked by regular communication, enabled teams to move directly into the action and work operationally towards achieving key objectives. All project progress was measured and - if necessary - readjusted. The new strategy also marked a robust personal start for Löber as a new organisational leader within the Group.

A professional portrait of Axel Löber, a man with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a dark grey suit, a white shirt, and a purple patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

” PEAK and the experts at FocusFirst have been instrumental in ensuring the success of the transformation - and that very fast.

– Axel Löber, SVP Brand & Marketing, E.ON SE

Axel Löber is Head of Global Brand & Marketing at E.ON and is responsible for the DAX company's brand management, international marketing, insights and customer experience. Before joining E.ON in 2019, he was Head of Corporate Branding & Strategic Communication Projects at the science and technology group Merck and was responsible for the company's transformational and multiple award-winning rebranding in 2015. Prior to that, Löber worked in various communication roles for pharmaceutical wholesaler and pharmacy operator Celesio (now McKesson Europe) and strategic communications consultancy Hering Schuppener (now FGS Global).

About FocusFirst

FocusFirst is a boutique consultancy for transformation and strategic change projects.

We are the specialised company in the industry that combines former top executives and an award-winning methodology for accelerating transformation. This unique „double helix“ of capabilities enables us to help our clients achieve results faster and reach challenging business goals. Executives work with us to develop and structure organisations and accelerate transformations. We work with leading Fortune 500 companies such as Merck, Novartis, E.ON and BASF, and established medium-sized companies.

This is us.

Our senior advisors & experts are located in 10 cities within 6 countries, spanning 3 continents. The team has planned, led, and supported international projects in over 30 countries.

We have won 5 awards for our innovation & excellence.

We are a family-owned business. Our freedom and objectivity are not restricted by anyone. We work with those who share our belief that leadership is the ultimate lever for positive change and value creation.

We are on a mission.

When René Esteban founded FocusFirst, he found that too many transformation projects take too long, waste money, and annoy stakeholders – and that there must be a way to accelerate business transformations, sustainably. This belief unites an international FocusFirst team consisting of former top executives and subject matter experts. Today, we are honoured to serve senior leaders across many of their most critical leadership challenges.



All Senior Advisors were former executives and were responsible for international organisations.



René Esteban
CEO, Founder, Senior Advisor



Melanie Esteban
Art Director



David Braga
Manager



David Jeans
Senior Advisor



Katherine Starks
Senior Advisor & Coach



Sandra Cameron
Senior Advisor & Coach



Anthea Heitkamp
Senior Consultant



Thomas Mickleit
Senior Advisor



Canny Little
Senior Advisor



Tobias Heeger
Expert



Anastasia Jakopanec
Marketing & Operations



Carolin Adler
Senior Advisor & Coach



Gerlinde Jayme
Expert



Darius M. Ghiai
Senior Advisor & Coach



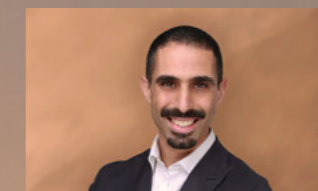
Susanne Ringen
Expert



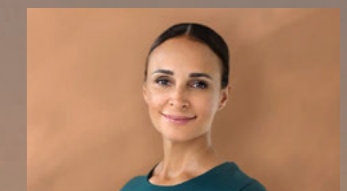
Tim Shaw
Expert



Susann Kunz
Expert & Coach



Ali Boujataoui
Expert



Amina Carter
Expert



Dr. Petra Kring-Kardoš
Expert



Dr. Matthias Finke
Expert

... and many more Senior Advisors & Experts.

Selected references

We are honoured to work with senior leaders at:



1. Building and accelerating the growth of an e-commerce organisation
2. Bringing two teams together after post-merger
3. Holistic realignment of an energy company
4. Building an international marketing team focused on one goal
5. First 100 days of a new board
6. Realignment of the communications department
7. Introduction of global systems (SAP, website, CRM, etc.) worldwide
8. Key stakeholder management of the supervisory board & executive board
9. Strategic communication for global company transformation
10. Introduction of new corporate culture





Transformation success by design...not by chance.

We would be honoured to help.

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I am focused.