

Case Study

Active Leadership Programme



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Programme Overview

The Active Leadership Programme was a 2 day workshop situated at the iconic Royal Military Academy Sandhurst specifically designed for senior managers in the Global Markets division of a major bank consisting of approximately 4,500 employees.

With a mixture of discussion, academic models and experiential interludes, the programme was designed to help managers reflect on the key skills and knowledge to increase engagement with staff and improve performance.

Context

After several challenging years in the industry during which time the bank had undergone a number of major transformations resulting in organisational turbulence, the client decided to invest in a People Strategy. The purpose was to improve engagement with and empower staff, to inspire them to perform more competitively and work in a way that improved business outcomes. The strategy was part of a wider Culture change programme and meet Regulatory expectations.

The critical component of the strategy centred on the Develop pillar which focussed on career and personal development of employees. It was determined that the strategy and this pillar in particular would need to be championed by senior managers and a target population was identified of some 350 Managing Directors and senior Directors across Europe.

Objectives

The main aims of the Active Leadership Programme were to:

- » Help and engage managers to develop a Personal Leadership Philosophy for greater knowledge, capabilities and self-reflection.
- » Raise awareness of how to achieve a common purpose and alignment of objectives across the business area.
- » Revise the knowledge, skills and leadership attitudes required for senior managers to improve the culture of engagement including:
 - » Having difficult conversations, managing conflict and practice in providing effective feedback.
 - » Setting team responsibilities and communicating clear expectations.
 - » Peer to peer sharing of experience and ideas on good practice across the senior community.
 - » Introduce practical tools to enable managers to apply lessons back in the workplace for sustainable performance enhancement.

The main measures of success were centred on:

- » Direct engagement with staff by senior managers.
- » Participation in development programmes.



Strategy and Implementation

The processes and rationale were as follows:

- » Design team and the Business team identified and conducted a high level review of the articles related to leadership and people development for the business area, and HR policies and programmes.
- » A cross section of the EMEA workforce and activities were surveyed to review how business strategy is embedded in Global Markets practices to ensure motivated and empowered staff, and identify gaps or poor alignment.
- » From the data, the team determined the expectations of MDs in both leadership and management perspectives to translate the design into tangible actions.
- » On-site feedback / analysis was provided to the People Strategy Steering Committee that had been formed to oversee the new strategy.
- » Undertake a discussion with the Steering Committee to agree next steps.
- » The rationale for this process was to ensure that senior business people were involved in identifying the requirement and took ownership of the solutions. A trial programme was conducted off-site with all of the senior members of the Steering Committee participating. The content of the programme was then further refined based on feedback. A Board member of the Division or one of the more senior managers attended many of the events to reinforce the importance of the activity and was supported by a representative of the People Strategy to maintain continuity.
- » A series of follow up on-site sessions were held to reconnect delegates with their facilitator and each other, as well as to mitigate the inevitable “skills fade”. Each of these provided uniformly positive feedback about the usefulness of the tools for delegates.

Programme content

With limited contact time with the delegates, the programme needed to be pithy, pragmatic and memorable. It was designed to give practical, easily-applicable tools that were fit for purpose immediately on return to the workplace. The programme was therefore designed with a mixture of business-specific discussions, experiential activities, and more traditional academic input.

However the emphasis was always placed on the “So what? Now what?”, and the need to take responsibility – to be “Active Leaders” in every sense of the word.

Our knitted-in consulting approach give us a close familiarity with the business and its challenges, and enabled us to design a programme that addressed the key issues that had been highlighted during the lengthy preparation: so, tools for effective listening and feedback, cascade of the Vision and commensurate clarity of roles, tools for decision-making, conflict management, and collaboration.

The Sandhurst motto of “Serve to Lead” provided an excellent handrail for the cadre to think of themselves as the servants of those they lead, rather than the other way round – and a natural by-product of the programme was a mutually-supportive network of leaders with a common language and shared experience.

Results

The impact on the learners and reach across the organisation was significant, improving the culture of leadership and management, with direct and indirect contributions to the broader People Strategy.

- » In a fast paced and demanding business environment the extremely high levels of commitment to the programme were unprecedented.
- » Based on feedback from on-site follow up sessions, all managers were using at least one of the tools provided during the programme in the workplace.
- » The senior managers were energised by the experience and sponsored several development initiatives including a coaching programme and a mentoring scheme.
- » Many of the programme attendees engaged the Learning and Development team for the first time seeking advice, learning products or assistance to set up team development sessions.
- » Over the course of one year the number of Ambassadors to the People Strategy increased to over 100.

- » From a business population of approximately 1,800 staff, some 700 people participated in newly designed team building events, and 400 people attended manager led discussion forums.
- » At the end of that year, the percentage completion rates of the on-line performance appraisal were amongst the highest in the Investment Bank.

Key lessons identified were:

- » The design of a programme by the business for the business, and therefore ownership by business leaders was a critical factor in its success.
- » Continued and targeted investment in senior managers can have disproportionate impact on the overall culture of an organization.

LEADERSHIP



Stakeholder feedback

“We are into cohort no.3 and I just really wanted to drop you a note to say that the feedback has been off the charts.”

“After each cohort I personally have had emails or texts thanking me (as if it was just me..!) saying it is the best thing they have ever done at xx - it is also worth mentioning that some notes have come from the most jaded people we have here at the bank.”

“So well done to you and the team. I have been busy roping in every senior leader we have here in Markets to open the programme and join in - it hasn't been difficult since the feedback has started to come in...”

Deputy CEO Corporate and Investment Bank
UK and Ireland

“This was much the best course I have attended in nearly 28 years of working. The combination of the content and the delivery, allied to the venue made it a special 2 days. I am often quiet in sessions like this and also somewhat cynical about their effectiveness. In this case I was enthused, was an active participant and became more vocal - as did everyone else = as it went on.”

“Overall a very positive, constructive, tangible experience that will drive real results. I have been involved in a lot of training programs at the Bank and have never seen everyone (no matter how sceptical to start with) come back with such positive feedback and a feeling that this was useful time spent”

“The best course that the bank has organized. The facilitators, the surroundings, the participation of all the employees made the 2 day course a real success.”

“I readily admit that I often approach training courses with a fair degree of skepticism. This was by far the most enjoyable and tangibly beneficial course I've been on in a long time, and I felt willing and enthusiastic throughout.”

“This course had me energized and keen on participation, was fully focused to the two days, much more so than other courses I have been on. I would easily rate it number one course I have ever been on.”

“It's very rare that a 2 day course is engaging & relevant for its entirety. Very well structured and facilitated by proven leaders.”

Contact

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