



Tiered Leadership Development

Overview

When professional services firm, The Gap Partnership, set themselves ambitious growth targets, they recognised the value that Business Psychology could bring in preparing their Leadership team for the challenge.

They worked with Business Psychologists from Indigogold to develop preparedness for three levels of Leaders.

Challenge

The Gap Partnership (TGP), a professional services firm, specialised in experiential negotiation training and consulting, in over 50 countries worldwide. TGP helped organisations drive profitability, increase efficiency and reduce cost.

After almost two decades of notable success and growth, the business gave itself an ambitious target: to double in size over the course of the next five years

‘What Got You Here, Won’t Get You There’

Achieving their growth objective would require many significant changes, not least of which would be changes to the way the business was managed and led. A review of the organisation’s management and leadership, in context of its growth objectives, revealed the challenges to be addressed.

- The leadership pipeline typically saw promotion of TGP Consultants. But the personality profile that was optimal for a TGP Consultant in the early years (individualistic, pragmatic, and competitive) would not be ideally suited to delivering organisational growth. A wider range of skills and qualities, that could be used with versatility in Leadership roles, would need to be identified and nurtured
- Increasing the size of the organisation would necessitate increasing the size of the management and leadership teams. Defined structures, where roles and responsibilities were clearly delineated, would facilitate effective induction of new Managers and Leaders. Senior Managers may have needed to increase their willingness to delegate, ‘loosening of the reins.’ And clear lines of accountability, with greater autonomy, would support individual and group ownership and development
- In the longer-term, high potential employees in lower level positions would need to be retained to join the leadership pipeline. This would require that these individuals be identified and developed in a systematic manner, to prepare them for future leadership roles

Three Solutions

TGP recognised the need to structure a Leadership Development Programme which would be suited to TGP’s particular context and each Leadership group’s varied requirements.

They anticipated creating a Programme that would resonate with the commercial focus of the Participants, whilst expanding their perspectives. They would need to create an

environment of trust and transparency to optimise individuals' development. And that would require an understanding of the Participants' particular ways of working, internally and externally. This was something which Business Psychology approaches could help TGP achieve.

The Business Psychologists from Indigogold needed to approach these challenges at an individual and team level, while keeping the organisation's long-term objectives in mind. Additionally, they wanted to yield tangible returns on the investment to be made in the Development Programme.

Three proposals were prepared. These collectively addressed a tailored response to the three needs that TGP had identified:

- Needs of the Leadership team
- Needs of the business unit Leaders
- Needs of the "high potential" population

Approach

Indigogold undertook the work of developing three bespoke Leadership Development Programmes using a combination of modular learning, coaching sessions and real-life business challenges. They explained their approach, saying: "Creating Leadership capability is about so much more than learning a set of skills; we wanted to give the Participants a framework for self-analysis, putting them in the driver's seat of their own growth and development."

They designed course materials with a full spectrum of learning approaches in mind, using immersive learning and continuous feedback for maximum impact and retention. (*See Editor's Observations.*) It was crucial that the program be anchored in the commercial realities of the business, frequently referencing tangible outputs for TGP as well as the individuals involved.

Assessment Phase

The Business Psychologists began by reviewing the current quality of the Leadership pipeline to create a tailored and actionable plan with two measures. Both were particularly relevant in the case of this organisation, as they enabled the Business Psychologists to recognise the value of qualities that got Leaders (the Programme's Participants) to where they were. At the same time, they helped Participants understand when a rebalance of characteristics was required for them to become more effective Leaders of people in the context of a growing organisation.

The Leadership Versatility Index®

The Leadership Versatility Index (LVI) is a quantitative and qualitative 360° feedback tool used to explore reputation. This tool differs from other 360° assessments in that it examines an individual's Leadership versatility, in different situations. This differs from tools that assess a set of specific qualities intended to represent a 'catch-all' Leadership profile.

The LVI is based on a leadership model that consists of two major pairs of opposing but complementary approaches. These two oppositions represent the tensions and trade-offs that make management a balancing act. One pair, Forceful and Enabling, concerns leadership style, how one leads. The other pair, Strategic and Operational, concerns the organisational issues a Leader focuses on, what one leads. Each of these major pairs is comprised of three pairs of specific subdimensions (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006).

The Hogan Assessment Suite

The Hogan Assessment Suite was used to explore identity. This consisted of three elements:

- the first measure addressed five 'bright' qualities of a personality
- the second looked at a number of sub-clinical scales for the 'dark' side of personality
- the third explored the motivators for these behaviours

The Hogan tools did not specify whether a certain personality profile was 'good' or 'bad,' instead analysing the suitability of a certain set of characteristics in a given context.

For Leaders, the results can help them gain the self-insight necessary to establish behavioural goals, aimed at facilitating personal development. When used for the identification of High Potential individuals, the results can help organisations accurately identify individuals who possess the characteristics and competencies necessary to move into leadership positions (Hogan & Hogan, 2007, 2009, 2010).

The Three Programmes

The content of the three programs then diverged to fulfil the needs of each group.

The Leadership Team

The work undertaken with the Leadership team focused initially on increasing self-insight. Leaders were enabled to respond to questions such as:

- Who are you and how do people see you?
- What are the formal and informal roles that you play in the Leadership team?
- How do you role model development, to set an example for the rest of the organisation?

Working with the Leadership team as a whole, the Business Psychologists analysed the preponderance of Leadership team members in each informal role, to better understand their overall efficiency. They found significant overlap in some areas, and almost complete lack in others. This allowed them to work to address opportunities, rebalancing individuals' roles and improving the functionality, and performance, of the team as a whole.

Business Unit Leaders

Work with the Business Unit Leaders focused on developing their management capability and proficiency at coaching people, to manage performance.

An immersive methodology was used, based on case studies which prompted reflection and learning. They were then supported in the application of their learning to practical exercises and 'real life' situations.

High Potentials

Work with the individuals identified as having a high level of potential, to be successful in leadership roles in future, focussed on increasing their self-insight and recognition of the qualities that they would need to develop for a career transition into a Leadership role.

The Participants worked in two groups, each given one of the five pillars in the organisation's 2020 strategy to explore. During this activity the individuals had to maintain an awareness of the roles and dynamics developing through the teams' processes and consider stakeholder management within the organisation.

Each group presented their findings back to the Leadership team, ‘Dragons’ Den’ style, in a realistically pressurised environment. The Leadership team then involved these individuals in the decisions the business would be making over the next five years.

Outcome

Measurement of the Programmes’ success included considerations of the Participants’ experience as well as the business value created. At the time of case study preparation, the Programmes were still in progress but individual outcomes had already become apparent.

Participant Feedback

Participants rated the Programmes positively overall. When asked in feedback surveys to rate their experience on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) they reported as follows:

Statement for Rating	Mode	Mean
Concepts and principles were clearly explained	5.00	4.75
Exercises were useful in gaining an understanding of the concepts	4.00	4.00
The facilitator was knowledgeable on the subject matter	5.00	5.00
The facilitator ensured there were many opportunities to contribute	5.00	5.00
The pace was appropriate	3.00/4.00	3.86
I can apply what I learned to develop my Leadership skills	4.00	4.39
I was adequately challenged by the content	4.00	4.00
The content was relevant and interesting to me	5.00	4.71
How would you rate today’s session overall?	5.00	4.75

When prompted to rate, on a 10-point scale, “How clear are you about your development areas?” the mean response was 8.1. And, when asked, “At this moment in time, how confident are you about your ability to improve in these areas?” the mode response was 10, with a mean response of 8.87.

Participants’ perception of their relationship with their Programme Coaches has been recognised to be a determining factor in the success of executive development interventions, as well as a strong indicator of the nature of the outcome (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch & Jones, 2012). So, this early indication of Participant engagement was considered a promising result.

Measures of Success

The Business Psychologists planned to continue to measure return on investment by assessing outputs of the Programme in the year/s that followed.

The Leadership Team’s advancement would be evaluated with another set of 360° surveys, when the Coaching Programme was complete, to identify any improvements in their effectiveness and versatility.

Business unit Leaders would also be evaluated with another set of 360° surveys, to look for improvements in Leadership effectiveness. Additionally, the Business Psychologists would collect quantitative data on their teams: employee turnover, sales results, and succession rates, as well as data on Level 2 (Learning) of Kirkpatrick’s model for evaluating the effectiveness of training. (See *Editor’s Observations*.)

High Potentials would be assessed by the Coaches during the modules to measure the quality of the organisation's talent pipeline, in terms of both their ability to change individuals' behaviour and their contribution to the group. They would also be asked to rate each other at the end of the Programme, and report on improvements in their performance on the job.

The Business Psychologists reflected, "Although it's not possible to prove incontrovertibly that the training was beneficial, all evidence seems to support the positive impact of the Programmes. It is possible that the very act of investing in Participants' development may be linked to increased confidence amongst Participants."

Lessons Learned

When undertaking these Development Programmes, the Business Psychologists encountered an unexpected level of enthusiasm and involvement from Participants. On reflection they suggested they would better leverage this in future, to include more reading and exercises on the Leadership theories presented, consolidating Participants' learning and introducing further concepts.

The logistics of the Programme meant that there were a lot of individuals doing the Leadership Versatility Index feedback at once. In retrospect they believed that spreading this requirement out over a greater time period would have been beneficial.

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Editor's Observations

In this case study the Business Psychologists described their approach as "using immersive learning and continuous feedback for maximum impact and retention." For the reader's reference:

- Immersive learning is the process of learning with the usage of a simulated or artificial environment. The environment enables the learners to completely get immersed in the learning, having a particular experience, without the potential risks that may exist in that context in reality. The realistic simulation of real-life scenes can increase the effectiveness of the learning (de Freitas & Jarvis, 2007). It can also be valuable in simplifying complex contexts and enhancing learning effectiveness (Freitas & Neumann, 2009)
- Continuous Feedback has been defined as a mechanism or a process where an employee receives ongoing feedback and is guided in a systematic manner by openly discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the employee (*The continuous feedback model is also known as the Deming wheel, as it was developed by a management consultant, Dr. Edwards Deming, in the 1950s*) - Clodagh O'Reilly, Founder of the ABP Awards

In their discussion of the results of these Programmes, the Psychologists referenced Kirkpatrick's model. The Kirkpatrick Model has been used effectively to measure the effectiveness of learning interventions for some time. (Kirkpatrick, 1955) The model assesses increasing impact at four levels: participant reaction, learning demonstrated,



application of skills or behaviour and business results. For multiple examples of the effective application of the Kirkpatrick model, please see the second book in this Applied Business Psychology series, titled “Managed Metamorphosis.”