

Lead2Lead: The Leadership Exchange Programme

Case Study

Corporate Alignment and Personal Leadership Development

LEAD2LEAD developed its working principles based on training experience and academic research (Western 2006, Western and Gosling 2007)

Working Principles

- Leaders learn more from each other than they do from trainers
- Leaders learn more from context than they do from classrooms
- Culture change occurs through personal conversations and personal experience
- Personal development and organizational development should be aligned and delivered in unity.

The Case Study Basell: A world leader in plastics

“Basell is the world's largest producer of polypropylene and advanced polyolefins products, a leading supplier of polyethylene and catalysts, and a global leader in the development and licensing of polypropylene and polyethylene processes.”

Let 100 Flowers Bloom

In this lead2lead project we paired 100 senior managers (one level below board) from all parts of this global company to undertake a reciprocal leadership exchange. The company was going through a three-way corporate merger.

Our agreed aims were three-fold:

1) Organizational Alignment: Creating a common culture

Creating integrated leadership, a common culture and developing shared values. Building communication networks. Sharing best practice, developing a company leadership approach.

2) Undertaking a Cultural Audit of the ‘new’ company to help plan future developmental requirements. To be achieved by utilizing their own leaders as action-researchers, creating a true alignment between research and improving practice.

3) Improving Personal Leadership Capability

Identifying individual strengths and weaknesses, training in leadership skills, practice in leadership coaching, feedback and communication skills, observation and reflection skills. Learning from each other, sharing best practice, getting feedback when being observed from a knowledgeable leader. Receiving individual coaching to debrief exchange, and embed and apply the learning.

Planning the Exchanges: Matching is the key.

Previous experience has taught us that the matching process is vital and we bring specific skills to this process. Working closely with the board and HR team we carefully planned the pairings to ensure best fit for the company and the participants: our criteria was based on three main factors:

- 1) **Organizational Alignment:** What parts of the organization needed to be better connected and which leaders could utilize the skills from each other's functions/departments?
- 2) **Personal leadership:** Making the most of matching one leader with another, taking into account strengths and competency gaps in both hard and soft skills and experience.
- 3) **Maximizing Difference:** Our research shows that putting leaders in situations that stretch them makes the exchange learning richer? Difference is based on such things as geography, function and skill sets.

The Pre-Exchange Training

The senior managers were trained in innovative observation techniques to support reflective learning: how best to learn from observing their partner and to learn from self-reflection at the same time. We trained them to 'look awry' that is to see things from a new perspective, and how to give feedback to their exchange partner they were going to observe. The skills learnt in training are all transferable and underpin good leadership skills.

The Exchange

100 managers observing best practice, questioning their own assumptions, reflecting on how they lead their teams, collaborating with a partner to solve topical challenges and dilemmas proved to be a very powerful leadership development program. Each observed another leader for three days and were observed by the same person for the same time. The reciprocal nature of this approach is important. They gave each other personal feedback, shared stories, recognized developmental needs and identified strengths and best practice across the organization. The energy and buzz of 100 managers visiting and observing each other in the company was tangible!

The Debrief

Each leader received one-to-one coaching (some face-to-face, some tele-coaching) from external coaches, supervised under the Analytic Coaching Method (See Western 2010). This involves Depth Analysis (self learning) Role Analysis (how one takes up their role) and Network Analysis, (how one influences change in the wider system).

Leaders focused on embedding their personal and organizational learning and to look at ways to implement and apply this in practice.

Outcomes

Two things surprised the leaders and us; firstly how little the leaders had recognized their strengths and capabilities and how hearing positive feedback from a respected colleague had an unexpected widespread motivational impact across the company at a time when it was going through a huge, high-pressure change process.

Secondly how the exchange went beyond the two leaders directly involved and impacted on the whole team behind the leaders. Being visited by a senior manager made the team reflect on their performance and engage in dialogue about generic company issues and local specific challenges and strengths.

1) Organizational Alignment: Creating a Common Culture

New Networks

New links were made between leaders across the company that support a systemic leadership approach. The leadership exchange built new networks and promoting better understanding and a positive culture change. These face-to-face human links are more powerful, engaging and sustainable than virtual links.

Beyond individual learning

Observing a leader, in reality meant observing a department or team. Being observed heightens the capacity to reflect on what is normally taken for granted. The whole organization picks up on this process, as most of them are involved in it either directly or indirectly. 100 leaders exchanging then has an impact on their direct employees of over a1000 employees.

Systems Impact

Creating these exchange networks and normalizing the practice of observation, all contribute towards developing an 'Eco-leadership' approach (Western 2008, 2010) which means developing a systemic awareness of the organization and an ethical and values based approach to leadership. This type of leadership developmental shifts the mindsets from functional thinking to a more connected approach. The overall impact from this seemingly simple exchange programme is a culture change process that is truly greater than the sum of its parts.

2) Individual Leadership Performance

Individual leaders improved their performance directly due to learning best practice and gaining feedback and tips on how to lead their teams, how to run better meetings, how to deal with external challenges. It develops communication and feedback skills, and our observation training helps build an internal capacity for leaders and their teams to look at themselves and others, through a different lens.

This brief case study demonstrates the potential to develop leaders at their workplace, drawing on tacit knowledge, developing a greater individual awareness of their local ecology and get more connected to other parts of their organization, and the whole system.

3) Cultural Audit and Exchange News

An additional and powerful aspect of this approach was that the external coaches fed back the information to the central team who undertook a narrative analysis and collated organizational and leadership themes. This provided a cultural audit of the company not from expensive consultancy surveys, but from the embedded experience of the company's employees.

This is a unique way to gain rich qualitative data about whats really happening in the company. We fed this rich information back to all those who undertook the training and discussed this with the company board where we identified unexpected strengths

to build upon and future developmental requirements.

Quotes from the Manager's reflecting on their learning

'Multiply my learning by 100 leaders and the micro changes that take place with individuals represent a significant change programme with in the company'.

Communication:

'This exercise has caused both of us to reflect on the critical importance of communication skills among managers, and to consider whether we are making optimum use of communication tools and styles for the most effective and efficient communications within our organisation'

Leadership Styles:

'I used negative examples to highlight the seriousness of the situation. It was pointed out to me that this sometimes freezes people. I needed to find ways to motivate people, to get them to focus on how they could achieve success and the opportunities for doing this'.

Connectedness and Inter-dependence:

'When visiting my partner I asked what does he need to do a good job? This should be the question we ask also of our internal customers. We need to be concerned for their success as well as our own'.

Dr Simon Western
Director of Lead2lead

References

Western (2006) *PhD Thesis: Leadership Resisting Fundamentalist Tendencies*, Lancaster University Management School

Western and Gosling (2007): *Pairing For leadership: Leadership exchange process* Said Business School conference paper

Western (2008) *Leadership: A Critical Text*. Sage pub. london

Western (2010) *Eco-Leadership: Towards the Development of a New Paradigm* in Benjamin W. Redekop, ed., *Leadership for Environmental Sustainability*. New York, NY & Milton Park: Routledge, UK

Testimonial



Hoofddorp, The Netherlands

February 22, 2007

Subject: Lead2Lead Project

To Whom It May Concern:

I wish to confirm that the Lead2Lead Project was an important intervention for Basell. It was well-executed, well received on the whole by participants and beneficial to our organization development. Without hesitation I would recommend such an intervention to any organization that is seeking to foster cross fertilization of ideas and mobilize change in behavior.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rick Gutierrez".

Rick Gutierrez
EVP Human Resources & Corporate Communications