

Case Study: Leadership Development

A leading business application SaaS company targets global expansion.

Working to enhance an existing set of processes and internal development initiatives, we helped design a multi-level, multi-modal leadership development program targeted to ready a new generation of leaders capable of “globalizing” the business while maintaining their 30% CAGR.

The Firm: A major business application software company providing organizational SaaS solutions to over 1500 corporate clients worldwide.

The Challenge: A high growth, mid-size firm had grown to become one of the leaders in their competitive space. However, their space had also become much more crowded – with entrants big and small, accompanied by more sophisticated customer demands. With global expansion a defined opportunity and goal, our client recognized that they were at an important “tipping point” where increasing competition along with international expansion and increasing size presented a convergence of challenges never before encountered. These included managing complexity, making sure infrastructure and process kept pace with growth, and stimulating more strategic thinking and decision making outside of the executive team. From a sustainability perspective, the client also recognized that the engaged and involved culture that was so central to early growth was put in jeopardy by a rapidly growing employee base largely recruited from other companies.

The Solution: Working with the President and VP HR, we focused on several new initiatives that complimented the client’s existing talent programs. Specifically, we:

- Defined an executive leadership profile that clearly connected several critical individual behaviours to competitive advantages and drivers of corporate value.
- Created group (i.e., 8-12 participants) 360-feedback sessions for three cascading levels: Executives, Directors, and Managers. These highly unique, group-based

feedback sessions helped participants understand 360-assessment feedback by being able to test assumptions and validate feedback using context and observations provided by peers. This process was intended to create richer development plans, and build greater transparency and trust in the group through sharing and peer support. Not only were these sessions more cost-effective, but a powerful new way to share ideas, build competence, and drive peer accountability into development planning.

- Facilitated “peer coaching” sessions as follow up to development planning. Here, leaders discussed their development plans and actions in a confidential forum. They shared progress, challenges, discoveries, and brainstormed new ideas on how to move forward. Having leaders in the business provide each other feedback on the business provided an efficient and effective framework to build skills and move forward, faster. It also had the effect of building in the accountability that is often so difficult to sustain in most busy organizational contexts. Finally, it also clearly enhanced trust and broke down communication silos.
- Designed and implemented formal, internally-sponsored, monthly meetings between bosses and direct reports, at all three levels, to speed development and drive momentum.

The Results: The form and focus of the program created a stronger leadership pipeline across levels – all matched to a profile connected directly to the client’s competitive advantages. The client could actually measure alignment to these behaviours and evaluate our leaders’ progress relative to their business goals. Talent development was a cultural initiative that created “Leader Coaches” that re-emphasized learning and higher level decision making and performance throughout levels, all while increasing engagement. In the client’s words: “We’ve seen people grow through executing targeted, relevant plans, all supported by coaches, peers and bosses. We’ve also seen communication and sharing of ideas improve. In fact, we’ve seen our Directors start to take the lead in planning their own follow up meetings and business agenda outside of the program goals.”