

Fortune 500 Multinational Food Manufacturer

Development center boosts career paths for the **leaders of tomorrow**

When you've identified the rising stars in your organization, how do you capitalize on their talents? How do you develop them and inspire them to be tomorrow's leaders and influencers?

Recognizing that they had gaps in their leadership pipeline, the leaders of the European Marketing team of this international food manufacturer realized they needed to spend more time focusing on emerging talent.

They identified 21 young professionals with a track record of exceeding performance standards who had been challenging themselves with stretch projects. These people had been with the company for between six months and two years and were based in different countries in Europe.

To make the most of their potential, the company needed a formal development process. Young stars have fresh thinking and are hungry to learn and succeed. They're mobile and they're digital natives. This means they're ideally placed to be the leaders of the future.

The development process needed to:

- Show the selected employees that the business was serious about investing in them and their futures.

Business Challenges

- No structured development program for emerging talent
- Lack of clarity about the strengths and development areas of the emerging talent population

Company Profile

This multinational company produces some of the best-known convenience food brands in the world and employs thousands of people worldwide.

- Give participants a clear picture of their strengths and development areas.
- Bring the marketing population together as a community so they could learn from each other.

The planned outputs were:

- To create powerful development plans for everyone, built on evidence-based feedback relating to their strengths and development areas.
- To establish and maintain peer-to-peer coaching relationships.
- To inspire real ownership for ongoing development.

The company spoke with The Myers-Briggs Company to decide on the best way forward.

Solution

Our consultants spoke to the leaders to learn more about their behavior framework and used them as the foundation for a stretching two-day development center. The following activities were built into the program:

- Business simulation activities—two group activities, a role play, and a presentation.
- Self-reflection.
- Peer-to-peer feedback.
- Facilitated development planning session.

The following points were also key considerations:

- Aligning the development center to the company's culture—to enable effective succession planning now and in the future.
- Creating a sense of ownership by participants of the outcomes and their development goals.

Solution

- Design a stretching 1.5-day development center
- Bring people from different countries together
- Focus on behaviors, strengths, and development opportunities

No personality assessments were used, although participants were already familiar with the MBTI assessment. We asked them to share a couple of MBTI insights with their peers during the icebreaker at the start of day 1, and in their self-reflection activities we asked them to consider how their style and preferences might have influenced their approach in the exercises.

Getting ready to reflect

To get the most from the development center, participants completed a self-reflection questionnaire and prepared a presentation before the event. We asked them to tell us about a pivotal learning experience. Their presentations were the first activity of day 1.

Attending the development center

During the first day, participants went through several business simulation exercises as well as delivering their presentations. They completed self-reflection activities and got to know each other better during networking opportunities between activities. Day 2 centered around peer-to-peer feedback, feedback from observers, and a development planning session.

Embedding the learning

To consolidate the learning and keep it alive outside of the development center, our consultants helped run follow-up conference calls with all participants. The first post-center 'check-in' was one month after the event, with another at three months and the final check-in after six months. Participants also met with their line manager two weeks after the event to discuss their thoughts and learning points, and explore how they could work on their development actions.

We asked participants and their line managers to complete a pre- and post-development center questionnaire. We also conducted follow-up telephone interviews with a third of participants to explore, in more depth, what impact the development program had had on them and their performance in their roles.

“ Since the development center, 42% of the participants have been promoted and 23% are on stretch assignments. This is a group we didn't have sufficient visibility of before the event and they are now thriving.”

HR leader

Results

The stakeholders were keen for this event to be much more than just another couple of development days away from the office.

They wanted it to be a proper and 'sticky' learning experience that would help the 21 rising stars build on their strengths, maximize their potential, and play a role leading the business in the future. Stakeholders took part in role plays and observations on the day, ran the post-event check-ins, and were generally very much invested in the event.

In our view, this made a massive difference to those taking part and to the success of the program.

Everyone was fully engaged. Participants committed to the activities and networked during the breaks (we made a 'graffiti wall' for people to write their reflections on). One of the observers noted that the group was "Keen, eager to learn. Strong bias to get results, i.e. complete the task. Polite, courteous, respectful. High levels of self-awareness and humility. The participants really embraced the peer feedback sessions."

We could see that participants were willing to take feedback on board too, which was inspiring to see. They hadn't been through feedback sessions like this before and were really open to it. Several commented in the post-event evaluation interviews and questionnaire that they were still hungry for feedback. This was a real shift for them.

Post-event questionnaire responses confirmed that the development center had more than achieved its aims of enhancing self awareness and giving people a clearer picture of their strengths and development areas. Those who completed the post-event self-evaluation reports said:

- The development center had increased their focus on self-development.
- Since the development center they had tried out new approaches to the way they work.

Results

- Increased confidence within participants
- Full awareness of strengths and development areas
- Successful program format that can be rolled out to different departments
- Greater community and bonding within the marketing function

- They had been able to apply what they had learnt on the development center.
- Their self-awareness of their strengths and development areas had increased.

Here are some comments from participants.

What was most beneficial?

- “The feedback session on the second day was excellent, very valuable insights gained about my behaviors and style.”
- “People made observations I would never have gotten to from other sources.”
- “Being put to the test, out of comfort zone (simulations/roleplays), seldom get a chance to do so.”
- “Interacting with different people whom I wouldn’t normally interact with (e.g., understand cultural differences).”
- “Realistic exercises, different activities (individual and group), great prepared cases with interactive pieces (screens, data etc.).”

Key learning

- “Driving results is clearly my strength, but I need to be careful not to forget the how. Focus more on leading by knowledge to drive impact and influence.”
- “How I impact on others was eye opening.”
- “I have some development areas which directly impact my day-to-day job but also my future career. These aren’t going away so I need to address them.”
- “Overall, I took away how important it is to focus on yourself and to develop in business life, as often you are too busy to do this and focus on the business.”
- “I learned a lot from my peers today and so I collected ‘quick wins’ and best practices [that are] easy to put in place during meetings or in my day to day (behaviors, ways to present ideas).”

Impact on performance

- “I have recently had a promotion and taken on managerial responsibilities which didn't exist in the previous role. This is as a result of my performance at work.”
- “When it comes to group work I really try to let other people think and explore rather than be the one giving the direction and stopping the exploration process....It is mainly in our team meeting when there are a lot of people in, so it is a lot about asking open questions and open exploration of ideas, where I try not to be the one giving the direction at the start, but try to get ideas.”
- “Maybe one big impact, one thing I learnt, was a group observation: that we weren't commercially savvy enough. So, one of my big goals was to be more savvy, and it all links back to the post-campaign analysis, understanding numbers and understanding what drives the business and what performs well.”

A couple of general observations stood out, too.

One was the need to step back and take a bigger view of things sometimes. There was a tendency among participants to focus on task completion, and while this is undoubtedly important, critical thinking skills need to be encouraged too, especially for people who might become future leaders.

A second observation was how polite everyone was! It might have been because people were meeting each other for the first time. But if it means there is a culture of compromise, rather than one of healthy challenge, then it's a useful observation for future development.

Speaking about the value of the development center, one of the leaders noted that it wasn't just the participants who learned new things. “I think it's important for us, as marketing leaders, to get a view of what those young marketing talents are like and what they can bring to the company. I also think it's quite humbling I learned a lot during that day.”

In the follow-up calls after the event, we noted further common themes. Many participants talked about applying the bigger perspective to their projects, and everyone gave examples of what they were doing differently after the development center. For example: "An additional learning was to be able to step back from the situation and see the bigger picture. I can totally see the link between that and my day-to-day life. Whenever I have a whole load of numbers or words on the slides, what's the key message here? That's one of the key things I have tried to work on and that is linked to more strategic thinking on things. For instance, something I did to improve this was to try and think of a project I can pick up. My manager gave me a new project last week and I am going to start working on that soon."

Many people felt confident, supported, rewarded, and energized by the investment made in them by the business.

- "I have transitioned into a new role so a lot of things have changed. I think that the biggest change is in the confidence in which I do things, and that I am trying different things out."
- "The experience in the development center has given me more confidence and belief in my own abilities."

The success of the program was summed up in this comment from one of the stakeholders:

"The importance of this program is obvious, as it is important for us to develop young talent...the most important thing is not how good we are. The most important thing is how fast we develop. And I'm convinced that what we started today will help every individual make every day a growth day for them."



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