



CASE STUDY

Company: Heineken

Sector: Brewing

## The business impact of Action Learning at Heineken

### CHALLENGE

To increase performance and productivity globally

Heineken developed a First-line Management Development Programme to help achieve their objective. Specifically they wanted their leaders to be:

- To be better at developing people
- To be better able to motivate their teams
- And as a consequence, be better able to manage performance

Additional considerations were how to achieve this improvement on a global scale, to reach up to 6000 front line managers. Heineken was seeking to achieve consistency in operations where there were cultural and language differences, operational disparities and educa-

tional variances, all whilst managing 200 local brands.

A key objective was to ensure the learning that took place during this programme was embedded so that it led to real change in behaviours and competencies across the organisation. Action learning was seen as a way of creating a space where programme participants could share with each other how they were applying their learning and to ensure that there was a transfer of learning to behaviour – i.e. managers were doing things differently.

It was also a space where managers could share the challenges of their role and talk about the action they would take to resolve problems.

### METHODOLOGY

We worked with Heineken to embed action learning as a development tool across the organisation. By training their internal HR and OD professionals plus many others with a brewing function, in action learning facilitation, they then had the relevant skills to go on to run their own action learning sets.

We ran nine action learning facilitator training programmes in Amsterdam, with more than 150 delegates



from 121 countries taking part. This meant that Heineken then had an internal resource to conduct action learning sets between each module of the First Line Management Development Programme, to augment each element of the training.

Participants were largely HR and OD professionals within the organisation so action learning as a development tool became part of their core competencies and as such became a skill that they could use in their ongoing roles, at no additional cost.

## RESULTS

New leadership skills resulted in an overall improvement in performance and better team cohesion across the globe.

Heineken reported an overall improvement in performance and better team cohesion across the globe as a direct result of the training and subsequent improvement in leadership skills.

Our work involves an evaluation stage of our programmes as a matter of course. This is when we can measure results against the objectives set at the start. Here are some of the benefits documented as a result of this programme:

- Improved cross-functional working
- Enhanced knowledge and understanding of the business as a whole
- Participants were able to see their role more strategically aligned to the overall objectives of the company

The programme was scaled up and also delivered in Kinshasa, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Vienna, Mexico and Nigeria.

The initial training programme was delivered face to face, with Action Learning trainers travelling to each country. Follow on sessions were conducted 'virtually' using conferencing technology to continue the work without the need and expense of travel.

- New leadership skills developed to cope with personality clashes, changes to working practices and understanding and appreciating others' roles
- Improved emotional intelligence at management level
- Leaders were more able to challenge their people to think and work through problems for themselves
- Increased confidence in managers' own problem solving skills
- Ability to have better conversations and understand the power of open questions

Above all, action learning was reported as being the most valuable element of the First-line Management Development Programme.

## ACTION LEARNING ASSOCIATES

Which of our strengths did we draw upon for this programme?

- Ability to adapt our programme to work in a global environment
- Ability to work with people from different backgrounds and cultures and to establish an environment of trust where a diverse group of participants were able to grow and develop
- Scaling up of action learning facilitator training to deliver to a global organisation so that 6000 front line managers could take part over 3 years
- Use of virtual action learning facilitator training techniques to run follow on sessions without the time and cost of travel