



CASE STUDY

Company: Ernst & Young

Sector: Financial

Embedding Learning within the Ernst & Young Accelerated Leadership Programme

CHALLENGE

To support the development of talented employees showing the potential to become partners or senior leaders of the firm.

Selected employees took part in a formal Accelerated Leadership Programme. It included action learning as a mandatory structured element of a process that included other optional modules, to embed newly acquired leadership and business skills through experiential learning.

The programme was designed to drive engagement and increase diversity, flexibility and the power of their internal leadership pipeline, as a core element of Ernst & Young's market leadership strategy. Overall, the firm was looking to enhance its capabilities and competitiveness in the marketplace.

METHODOLOGY

We put in place a programme of action learning sets to support the learning process of the Accelerated Leadership Programme. This programme was run on a large scale covering the whole of the UK and Ireland.

The work involved attending the initial onboarding conference and demonstrating action learning to a large group of seventy to eighty people using what's known as the 'fishbowl technique'.

We went on to conduct eight action learning sessions, two months apart, with up to nine participants per set. Overall, we worked with over seventy people on the programme each year, and were involved in the programme over 8 years in total. In addition, we ran two smaller supplementary programmes.

Participants were required to set themselves leadership challenges for the duration of the programme and to share these objectives. They were taken from across the business functions and represented Mergers & Acquisitions, Risk Assurance, Business Tax, International Tax, Advisory, Consultancy, Valuation, Project Finance, Restructuring and Audit.

It was agreed, and made clear, that the objectives for the work were to provide:

- a structured opportunity to reflect and share their learning as they progressed through the programme
- support and challenge from peers during their development

- the experience of a powerful process that increases listening, questioning, mentoring and engagement skills
- a safe space for honest feedback from the facilitator and peers
- time for practical application of learning in problem solving, planning and idea generation.
- An opportunity to hone skills critical for coaching and enabling others

At the beginning of each set, participants were required to report back to the group on the actions they had taken as a result of the decisions they made at their previous meeting. This was an important part of the process, ensuring they took responsibility for actions and applied their learning when back in the workplace.



RESULTS

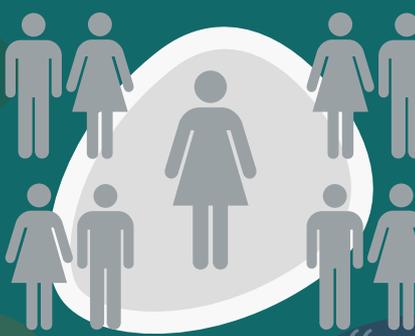
New leadership skills resulted in an overall improvement in performance and better team cohesion across the globe.

Delivering action learning and development work to such able and talented people can provide a challenge. We were pleased to hear these experts in their professional field report that their client management skills

developed as result of the listening and open questioning practice. Progress was tracked using an evaluation process to gain feedback from participants.

Achieving programme objectives

- “It’s a forum to discuss in an open and objective way - a safe environment”
- “Gives a perspective on an issue - is it really an issue?”
- “...think about issues properly and come up with your own solution”
- “feel less alone, sharing issues”
- “no other environment where you can talk so candidly.....even with counsellors who will frame things a certain way”
- “...a bit therapeutic”
- “Now, if I have an issue, I think about if I was sitting (in my action learning set) with them, what would they be asking me?”



What participants felt they gained and how they have used their new skills

- “It’s the best part of the ALP, it’s the part that has contributed most to new behaviours”
- “I have learned so much, you think you want advice but actually you want to be able to think about the issue properly”
- “This process helped me on a very difficult assignment. I realised I had to listen very carefully”
- “helped me facilitate difficult conversations”
- “It has helped me with my clients, I think I’m now a better consultant”
- “It’s been brilliant! Now I am familiar with the process, I feel I can use it on my own, a good problem solving process.”
- “working on something in the set helped me feel much more confident about the action”
- “using this style with my team - they have opened up, learning to take action”
- “practically helped me in difficult situations. In particular I have used the ALS techniques to deal with feedback, (upwards and to juniors). This has been recognised as a differentiating skill by various colleagues.”
- “I am a better consultant with clients, drawing them out and properly understanding what they want.”

How did the organisation benefit?

By using action learning to support and augment the learning taking place during the Accelerated Leadership Programme, the initiative helped to create:

- An internal pipeline of future leaders
- Greater ownership and engagement of people with the highest potential to lead
- A commercially focused group of future leaders
- "A real return on investment"

"I found action learning really useful- not only personally building on my listening, interpreting, team building skills but also in what I have gained from the actions with the ALS and learning different skills that I can take to the business."

Christine Molden, Resource Co-ordinator

ACTION LEARNING ASSOCIATES

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

- We were able to tailor a series of action learning sets to specifically enhance the learning of the accelerated leadership programme
- We planned and managed the programme to maintain continuity of delivery over a period of years
- We were uniquely placed as a deliverer of action learning, with a large team of facilitators who had experience in the consultancy world and could recognise the challenges presented in this programme



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