

CASE STUDY

National European Airline - Leadership Development



A subsidiary of General Physics (UK) Ltd
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Situation

National European Airline flies to c60 countries, carries over 7 million passengers a year and has a turnover of €2,023 million and employs c8,000 people. In 2010 a new CEO was appointed with an agenda to return the business to profit after a number of challenging years. By mid 2011 new appointments were complete and a renewed Executive Board (Leadership Team) had been formed. The need for business transformation was then determined and scaled in terms of savings, processes changes and investments needed. The strategy is in place to be the leading airline in the Nordic region and in top three for all transit traffic between Europe and Asia.

Challenge

The culture of the National European Airline had built up over a number of years in largely public ownership (56%). This had engendered a mindset that was unused to change and relied

on the leadership team to run the business. The new team was a mix of new appointments and existing Airline leaders with different perspectives on the approach to the scale and pace of change required. The CEO saw Leadership as a key capability and believed a change in leadership approach was essential to success, though this was not a widely shared view. The business was made up of circa 10 business units or functions with different views and needs about leadership.

Approach: Developing the Senior Team

The first task was to generate a case for change in leadership approach by talking to some influencers and representative leaders.

Bath Consultancy Group worked with the internal team to create a logical flow that demonstrated the link between the quality of leadership and the outcomes of the business.

As a result of this the Executive Board agreed to start the leadership development process as a team and if the impact was proven with the team, then to involve all the 120 senior leaders in all business groups.

Individual 360 feedback and 1:1 personal development consultations were held for the team of 10. This data informed the content and approach to a two day leadership development workshop which simultaneously coached the team dynamics to create a 'real shift' in the performance of the team. The content of the programme was used immediately to change the approach of some critical upcoming meetings and communications - and was seen as key to getting results that they wanted but had never achieved before. The team voted the event a significant success by impacting the behaviours of team members and convincing them that leadership development was critical to change in the business.

The Leadership Team agreed they would continue their development over a further four months. This included continuing to hold learning group coaching sessions with the

facilitators; inviting a coach to the Board Meetings to intervene, reinforce and challenge behaviours live as they occurred.

Finally an evening and a day was spent sharing learning to date, adding a few new techniques to the skill sets; but mainly taking the time to review and celebrate the significant progress and outcomes achieved by the team.

The Leadership development outcomes were achieved a year ahead of the schedule expected by the CEO and HR Director.

"The Senior Leader programme provided a fundamental, personal experience to our leaders at a very challenging time of change."

Head of L&D, National European Airline

LEARNINGS

“It was clear from the beginning that Bath... would actually start to change our leaders and business.”

Head of L&D, National European Airline

Approach: Developing the wider Leadership Group

While the Executive Board was continuing its development, the next 120 leaders were invited to participate in a similar leadership Development process. This was designed to create a common leadership approach and to shift the overall leadership culture, with the Executive Board members sponsoring and actively attending. The programme is still in progress; 100 leaders have started a process

including a 2 day workshop and learning group coaching sessions. In March 2012, the process will be complete and 120 people will meet with the Executive Board at a Leadership Summit event, designed to share new leadership experiences, successes and learning.

Outcome

- The Executive Board is much closer to being a high performing team
- The Leadership Attributes have been converted to individual behaviours that can bring them to life in their own situations
- There is a common language about leadership and talent attributes
- Feedback and direct conversations are much more common - resulting in an increased pace of change
- The progress of the business transformation suggests an optimistic view that the business will turn around its performance - market forces allowing



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