

Preparing Executives to Succeed In A Rapidly Transforming Industry

Situation

A major energy company was facing a rapidly changing business environment unlike anything the industry ever faced before. The CEO stated that the issues were:

1. How do we take senior executives who have been successful in one environment and give them the skills and behaviors they need to succeed in a vastly different one?
2. How can we do it rapidly, yet be assured that we are truly changing behavior?
3. How can we make sure that the skills and behaviors we develop are based on our unique set of industry dynamics?
4. How can we do it in a way that gets our best and brightest excited and energized, not fearful and resistant to a new way of leading and doing business?
5. How do we make sure the Board of Directors is also excited and supportive of this effort?

Intervention

The developmental process consisted of:

1. Creating a leadership framework to establish the skills and behaviors needed by the CEO and his/her direct reports to succeed in the new environment.
2. Assessing the top 4 levels of the organization on these skills and behaviors to determine developmental needs in their current positions and potential for success in the new environment.
3. A talent review process led by the CEO to identify high potentials and the developmental themes of the top executives
4. Debating the best way to close the identified gaps. After some debate, it was determined that an executive education workshop would be the best way of:
 - a. Ensuring everyone discussed issues in same language
 - b. Getting a critical mass of senior executives aligned around key issues
 - c. Getting everyone to work together in cross-divisional environment
 - d. Being challenged by external faculty (an external point of view)
5. A series of 3, 2-day workshops for 25 high potentials executives on:
 - a. Critical thinking and scenario planning
 - b. Execution skills
 - c. Stakeholder analysis and negotiation skills
6. Action learning projects
7. Individualized development plans and coaching

Outcome

When the use of key skills and behaviors was measured after the next strategic planning cycle, usage increased by 10% to 40% when compared to before the workshop series. As reported in a national newspaper who interviewed the company's CEO, "The initiative already appears to be paying off: We recently reported shares are up 54 per cent." According to the CEO there was a direct impact on the bottom line due to the application of new skills and behaviors.