

A black clothesline stretches diagonally across the frame from the top right to the bottom left. Various styles of shoes, including sneakers, loafers, and casual shoes in different colors like white, black, brown, and blue, are hanging from the line. The background is a solid, clear blue sky.

ig

**Building
leadership
capability in a
fast-growing
SME technology
firm**

The context

Our client is a technology firm with ten years of fast growth behind them. Employing nearly 300 people across the globe, their concept had catapulted them to early success, which was now reaching a plateau.

They were looking to increase their profitability and attract interest in external investment.

Although the business had matured operationally, their succession planning, talent management and leadership development provisions were almost non-existent. Attitudes towards existing and future talent needed to change to demonstrate sustainable value.

This triggered the involvement of IG.

The enterprise had grown organically. Often, promotion was based on who had netted the most profits or performed well as a specialist technician. Selection for management roles hadn't been based on leadership capability – it was more incidental than by design.

Mismatched management

The result: management were a combination of poorly supported and developed individuals promoted on other merits, and external talent that had been bought in reactively.

There was a significant lack of work-force planning.

Talent wasn't being recognised and nurtured, and opportunities for promotion were scarce and seemed to have no objective benchmarks to guide them.

This was leading to a waste of the organisation's most precious resource: their high potential employees looking for an upwards move. It was starting to create a competitive culture lacking in trust and collaboration which was having implications for operational efficiency.

“We hardly ever talked about talent or development; every conversation was about the product, or sales, or marketing. People were constantly guessing how they could get promoted, because no-one knew what the senior management were looking for. It was incredibly frustrating.”

Employee

A culture of disconnection

The business had an underdeveloped idea of what good talent looked like; their new HR Lead knew that they needed to invest in the development of a new leadership model to increase leadership capability and to create a shared language to talk about talent.

The culture had become one of 'heads in the sand', focussing only on the technical, operational, and short-term sales objectives. The future of the company, peopled by strong talent who could take it to the next level, wasn't a concrete reality; there was no holistic long-term strategy for success.

In an organisation of nearly 300 people spread across the globe, we knew we needed to go in at several levels for real and lasting change.

Digging for detail

We created a bespoke organisational intervention, targeting four key levels in the organisation through tailored, structured programmes:

- the senior leadership team including regional managers;
- middle managers leading large teams;
- high potential individual contributors – the company's 'Rising Stars'; and
- graduates.

All four populations would act as our internal agents for change.

By investing in their individual development, we could help build leadership capability in the short-term, whilst creating a cultural shift towards talent development to ensure continued return on investment.

What we did...

We believe the cornerstone of all development starts with self-insight.

Each programme was kicked off with rigorous individual assessment comparing identity and reputation:

Psychometric Suite exploring identity.

We used three different assessments to build a holistic picture of how each person would behave at their best, during times of stress and finally, to assess what motivations and values were driving that behaviour.

360 Assessment exploring reputation through both quantitative and qualitative data.

We used a 360 tool which focused on 'leadership versatility' in different situations; this contrasts an evaluation based on an 'ideal', de-contextualised definition of what makes a 'good' leader.

Neither of these tools specify what is 'good' or 'bad', they instead analyse the suitability of a certain set of characteristics to a given context.

“The feedback was difficult to swallow at times, but very helpful. It’s rare to get a clear picture of how other people experience you, and the opportunity to reflect on what to do about it.”

Participant, Middle
Manager Group

Encouraging agency

We knew the intervention needed to resonate with the commercially-minded approach of the organisation.

We anchored the design of each programme firmly into the realities of the business, frequently referencing tangible outputs for both the individuals and the organisation.

We made the course materials interesting and varied, using the full spectrum of learning approaches to make sure that the material hit home and stuck; our learning experiences were not a collection of classroom-based training sessions to be endured and forgotten.

// **“Creating leadership capability is about so much more than learning a set of skills; we wanted to give the participants a framework for self-analysis, putting them in the driver’s seat of their own growth and development.”**

Maisie Beckenham
Indigogold consultant

The talent quartet

- The senior leaders

The situation: The original entrepreneurs who had catapulted the business into growth a decade ago appeared to exist in an 'ivory tower', idealised by their employees as symbols of success. They were in the prime position to role-model a change in culture. Apparently inaccessible and opaque to the rest of the organisation, there was significant potential to improve transparency, cohesiveness and overall performance.

The solution: Much of the work with this population focussed on developing clear self-insight. We helped the individuals answer the questions, 'Who are you?' 'How do people see you?' 'What are both the formal and informal roles that you play in the team?' We also provided guidance on how to role-model development, to set an example for the rest of the organisation.

- The middle managers

The situation: Shifted into management roles based on their success as technicians or salespeople, rather than leaders, this group needed to develop the skills to deliver value from other people – not just from themselves.

The solution: We produced a programme to develop management capability and coaching skills in order to manage performance adding to their existing 'toolkit' to develop in-the-moment judgement and overall efficacy. We also used case studies and an immersive methodology to prompt reflection and learning. We then applied these learnings to practical exercises and 'real life' situations.

- The 'Rising Stars'

The situation: Poorly identified and lacking a structure for self-insight or development, these high potentials needed to develop the skills necessary to manage both themselves and others, preparing them for a step up.

The solution: The participants were led through a series of self-insight exercises, coupled with 1:1 coaching to explore their individual strengths and potential de-railers. We created a series of hypothetical 'stretch' opportunities in an experiential setting, supporting the development of the necessary qualities to transition into a leadership role. The objective here was to create a solid foundation of skills – a 'toolkit' – to equip them for increased complexity.

// **"The content of the programme was constantly anchored into the commercial realities of our business which allowed me to contextualise everything I was learning. This allowed me to start thinking about real business problems in a different way."**

Participant, 'Rising Star'
Group

- The graduates

The situation: Graduate identification and development was based around technical capability, the pool lacked diversity and graduates were underutilised across the business.

The solution: IG helped the organisation create a graduate selection and training scheme that would both pinpoint and prepare the individuals based on a broader range of skills needed for the future, planting the seeds for successful growth in years to come.

The proof is in the performance

We evaluated the effectiveness of the intervention at three levels: the individual, the groups and the organisation:

- Self-reported improvement
Among other equally positive self-assessments, 90% of participants were clear on their development areas, and of those, 100% were confident in their ability to improve on these – an increase of around 40% in both measures. .
- 360-degree feedback
We repeated the 360 assessments after the programme, and observed a marked increase in leadership versatility and applied capability.
- Talent pipeline
Over 70% of the ‘Rising Star’ group have successfully moved up into leadership roles; 80% of graduates in the scheme will also be moving up into more senior positions, with the remainder moving into positions with more breadth.

“The programme helped me to step up in advance of my next move internally. I was able to take ownership for my own development: it was massively empowering and beneficial.”

Participant, ‘Rising Star’
Group

The brave new future

After the completion of the first cohort of participants, HR were keen to build on the success of their intervention and conducted a number of stakeholder interviews to inform their on-going investment.

At this point, a number of senior leaders expressed an interest in continuing their development work. One senior said:

“When my first coaching engagement came to an end, I knew I wanted my coach to continue to work with me through a significant period of business change. I believe my coaching has added real organisational value; if HR didn’t have the budget I would have funded it from my own P&L.”

Participant, Senior Leader Group

In the face of such a positive response and with quantitative data starting to bear it out, the business engaged Indigogold to undertake a second, and then a third year of consulting to build on the solid foundation we had created.

We continued to work with the senior leaders on an individual and group basis, developing the self-insight and sound judgement that would enable the powerhouse of the organisation to flourish and excel.

We also continued to work with the high potential individuals to ensure that the best people, with their capability fully unlocked, were moving into leadership roles. This involved working in the wider organisation to ensure that the right opportunities existed, facilitating their advancement and addressing the leadership succession pipeline with a joined-up approach.

“IG know their stuff. They’ve triggered a systemic change in the business, and we’re already seeing the benefits.”

Participant, Senior Leader Group

Now well-established with a carefully designed curriculum, the middle management and graduate programmes will be run internally. We continue to support the business as an advisory partner and continue to build the internal capability of the people team to ensure the legacy of this work and its outcomes.

“I had preconceptions about what working with a boutique people consultancy would be like. IG completely exceeded my expectations.”

CEO