
LIM NEWS

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What

The first-ever coherent Management Learning Program for ICT (Information and Communications Technology) professionals consisting of pre-workshop activities, face-to-face workshop, and post workshop virtual teamwork.

Why

Traditionally, demand on the ICT officers has been primarily technical and project management-related. There is an increasing demand to better integrate the ICT function into the agency business and processes to enhance the effectiveness of the organization. As a result, the ICT officers are increasingly expected to link their work with the overall strategic goals of their organization and to develop their skills in the areas of staff and team management.

Who

The 15 participants represented diverse backgrounds and cultures. There were altogether six Africans, four Europeans, three Americans, one Australian and one Asian, coming from ICT's head office in Rome and from regional offices in Africa, Middle East, Asia and Panama. Their ages ranged from early 30's to mid 50's. Some of them had met and worked together before but most met for the first time in this program.

The three Learning Coaches came from America, Germany and Hong Kong.

How

The Learning Coaches based the workshop design on Action Learning principles, and the 15 ICT Officers worked on group projects designed to solve concrete organizational business challenges identified by the organization's Chief Technology Officer and used a blended approach of face-to-face workshops to be followed by 6 months of distance learning and online collaboration. The project teams were supported by the same three Learning Coaches who helped them identify learnings and develop the appropriate skills throughout the face-to-face part of the program.

During the workshop itself, senior managers and ICT officers were invited to share the organization's strategic vision and plans. Special subjects, such as communication skills and teamwork were presented by another program partner while the Coaches presented learning modules on innovation and change and introduced just in time learning tools on team communication and project planning. At the end of the virtual team coaching, the project recommendations will be presented to the senior management of ICT and the organization's senior managers.

Identified competency areas

In line with the above, the learning program supported the ICT officers in the areas of:

1. **Organizational awareness** – so that ICT Officers become active contributors to organizational change and innovation
2. **Client orientation** – so that ICT Officers have an improved capacity to manage client relationships :
 - Identify internal and external clients
 - Identify key current and future client services
 - Process feedback from client surveys
 - Develop strategies for the delivery of quality client services and negotiate these effectively with the client
3. **Team Work and Team Management** – so that ICT Officers demonstrate an increased ability to manage teams by:
 - Applying the principles of effective team work
 - Understanding the key challenges faced by diverse teams
 - Understanding the key challenges faced by virtual teams
4. **Communication** – so that ICT Officers demonstrate effective communication skills through:
 - Active listening
 - Receiving and giving effective feedback
 - Understanding the principles of negotiating

Memorable Events

- This was the first ever Action Learning program for the organization, but the Head of ICT, the chief sponsor of this learning program, was open to the idea of AL right away. The participants, however, were used to the traditional business school type of lecture and case studies, and we felt it important to introduce the concept to them early in the program and get their 'buy-in' to this 'new approach'. To do this, I explained the pros and cons of different learning intervention methods and how AL is 'learning that lasts.'
- Every morning, we started off the day with Reflection and Dialogue, a methodology totally foreign to the participants, but the meaning we got out of the dialogue was so rich. After the first Reflection & Dialogue on Day 1, we broke into Project Teams and I was happily surprised when team members started off asking each other to do a Reflection & Dialogue of what they thought of the project question !
- The team immediately saw the power of feedback, and requested that Giving Feedback should be an integral part of the Team's communication to each other for the remaining part of their project work. They valued the honest feedback, appreciated the recognition and constructive suggestions which they rarely receive in their 'real work'. What was supposed to be a short 30 minutes session turned into a full 2 hour session over the dinner table. The Project Team felt they were much closer to each other after the feedback session.
- The Project Team was very intrigued by the role of Learning Coach – one of them said he would really like to learn how to 'be invisible, like a fly on the wall most of the time, but come in at exactly the right time to ask the key question most pertinent to the moment to help the Team move forward'.
- The Teams are now back in the 'real world' and find that their 'day job' could 'interfere' with the Project work. Having said that, they are learning to work together as a virtual team, trying different technological methods including coachingplatform.com (collaboration

environment), email, MSN and teleconference. They are excited by the opportunities to learn more about the organization through the project work, and about working together collaboratively and horizontally in a virtual team. For me, the program was a powerful reminder of the effectiveness of the action learning methodology in breaking new ground even in organizations where hierarchy and bureaucracy can militate against some of the precepts and values of the methodology.

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