

Raising the Bar on Leadership Development

Great leaders can be developed. This principle forms the backbone to the 'Managing Self, Managing Others' programme at Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS). As the world's largest provider of custom research and market information, TNS knows the strongest force in their business is their people.

Dedicated to developing a first-rate workforce, Fareed Shaik, TNS Regional Training and Development Manager and Wyn Black, TNS Regional HR Director know the strategic value of the people working for their company. As a major player in the market research industry, maintaining its position as the number one custom research group in the world requires strong leadership and a robust talent pipeline.

In charge of leadership development and talent management, Shaik and Black recognised that traditional training programmes may not be the most effective method for developing their company's leaders, who are from different cultural backgrounds, are geographically dispersed across 16 countries in Asia Pacific, operate at different levels of the organisation, and are at different stages in their career paths.

TNS' growth and global presence in 70 countries have enabled them to identify and adopt best practices for supporting the development needs of their workforce, but Shaik and Black wanted to raise the bar on managing their talent and reducing competency gaps in leadership.

After investigating options available for their staff development needs, Shaik and Black believed 360-degree feedback tools and psychometric profiling would provide a good starting point to their leadership development programme. They explored numerous tools and found in the Linking Skills Profile developed by Australia-based Team Management Systems (TMS), the attributes they wanted to be included in their development programme.

To realise this, they called upon Cliff Chalon of HR Access, an Australian HR consulting firm and supplier of TMS diagnostics, materials and workshops, to design and deliver a programme that utilised the Linking Skills Profile as a self and group awareness tool and any other profiling tool which would meet the specific need of TNS.

Chalon says, "We chose the TMS Profiles because they are



backed by rigorous research, are practical, easily administered and can be applied with people from different cultural backgrounds."

An experienced trainer, Chalon specialises in team and leadership development. He works with teams and applies different instruments according to the needs of the employees. Chalon is accredited in the selected Linking Skills Profile, a 360-degree assessment tool that provides feedback on how well an individual is performing on 13 key linking skills.

Linking is a set of skills that were identified by Charles Margerison and Dick McCann, founders of TMS, in their extensive work with teams. Through their work, they identified 13 key linking skills which, if implemented effectively, contributed to the development of a high-performing team.

McCann says, "The Linking Skills Profile is particularly useful because it provides non-confrontational feedback on key managerial and leadership skills and highlights the most important activities for the individual to focus on."

The Linking Skills Profile provides feedback obtained from the individual, their supervisor and their direct reports, to identify to what extent certain activities should occur in the individual's performance, and to what extent do they occur. The result is a composite profile which compares the individual's self-assessment with the assessment of others.

Chalon says, "The detailed and specific feedback contained within the Linking Skills Profile provided a powerful training needs analysis, which enabled us to pinpoint the participant's development priorities. At each step of the way, participants were asked to summarise their learning and generate action items in relation to



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their work improvements. In this way, we supported the managers to make full use of the results and transfer their enhanced awareness immediately back to their work."

He adds, "Each manager also received their own Team Management Profile, which provided further insight into how they communicate and influence others, gather and use information, make decisions, lead others and what impact this has on their teams. When combined with the feedback in the Linking Skills Profile, this made for an intense but comprehensive learning experience, enabling them to develop concrete action plans to take back to their workplace."

Alice Cheong, a research manager at TNS comments, "The profile feedback was particularly useful in helping me redirect my behaviour when working with my supervisor and co-workers."

On the approach taken in the programme, Shaik says, "We used experiential and accelerated learning techniques throughout a three-day workshop to solicit active participation and engagement from participants. At every opportunity, the group was encouraged to apply the learning to the workplace, by considering their own experience and sharing ideas with others. In this way, an environment of continuous learning was fostered."

TNS Business Group Director, Andrea Snook recalls her experience with the TMS Profiles, "Personally, the programme really helped me to identify not only the areas which I consider important in management, but also how the team perceives my management style. It challenged me to think about how I do things and gave all of us an immediate action plan to take forward with the support of our colleagues, to develop a strong, high-performing team."

The introduction of the TMS Profiles to the 'Managing Self, Managing Others' training programme, almost a year and a half ago, has since then filtered throughout the organisation and is run every two months across the Asia Pacific region, depending on where the nominated managers are based.

"Our focus on leadership and talent management has been strong," says Shaik. "The added focus of using psychometric profiling and 360-degree feedback instruments to improve self-awareness and relationships with others is an important step towards cultivating talent and enhancing performance within the organisation, so that we can maintain our competitive position of being the world's largest custom research group in the world."

THE LINKING LEADER

The TMS view on leadership is that it is primarily about relationships. Excellent leaders monitor and develop relationships among their followers and ensure that this emphasis is rolled down from their direct reports to the bottom-most layers of the organisation.

The TMS framework combines the concepts of supportive and directive behaviour with the ideas of transactional and transformational leadership to produce a multi-level team leadership model - The Linking Leader (figure 1 below). Leadership is about Linking - a set of behaviours arising out of acquired skills that encourage the coordination and integration of followers, thereby creating a unified team that knows where it is going and how to get there.

Figure 1. The Linking Leader Model



Source: Team Management Systems

The Linking Skills Profile is a powerful multi-rater tool that provides the necessary feedback for improved leadership, by acting as a strong driver for change.

Feedback is obtained from the supervisor, direct reports, peers and even clients, where appropriate. The Profile includes text, visuals, and numeric data that allow individuals to compare their self-perception and the views of others. A single, in-depth report forms the basis for personal development.

The Linking Leader Profile is particularly useful for:

- Talent Management and Leadership Development
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Executive Development