



IMPACT STORY

Communication Company

ExperiencePoint®

IMPACT STORY

Innovative Change Leadership Program Prepares Hi-Pos to Lead a Changing Business

Challenge

One of the world's largest communications companies is experiencing rapid change as it transforms to meet the needs of an ever-evolving marketplace and technology environment. Recognizing that both the company and the industry will be drastically different by 2020, its leadership has developed a vision to outline how the company will need to shift its technology, skills and leadership approaches over the next several years.

This reality of continual change was on the mind of the Associate Director/HR Business Partner supporting the company's technology development organization as he looked at how his team could develop and prepare the group's high potentials, or "hi-pos"—those employees who are being groomed for future leadership roles.

"HR has done a great job of instituting programs to help people pivot their skills to adapt to the changing business," he says. "So we wanted to provide this group with additional development opportunities in that area. Since they're the future leaders in the technology development space, we wanted to support them and make sure they'll be able to help lead the change that's necessary."

In 2015, 215 employees from across the country had been nominated by their leaders to be part of the technology development group's hi-po program. The year-long program includes a variety of different learning experiences, categorized into four specific areas based on recommendations made by the company's general managers: (1) financial literacy, (2) broader knowledge of the business,

(3) exposure to different roles within the technology development organization, and (4) leadership and communication, which encompasses change management as well as experiences like a collaboration survey and a learning agility assessment for helping people understand how quickly they can adapt to change.

The Associate Director points out that change and innovation are both leadership competencies people are measured against and held accountable for. For this group, the expectation is they will become change agents and able to effectively lead change.

To build the change management competency, the Associate Director's goal was to provide a development opportunity that would help this group step up the responsibility of leading change, giving them the framework and strategies to make change happen successfully rather than simply being participants reacting to change.

Knowing that Kimberly Douglas, President of Firefly Facilitation, Inc., had been working with the company's executive university program on a variety of leadership development initiatives, the Associate Director reached out to her as a resource to help him identify a program that would meet his needs.

Douglas had a solution in mind. And with some innovative implementation approaches, she felt it would not only address the learning outcomes but would also open up new ideas about how technology could be used to deliver an engaging training experience to a large, dispersed audience.

Solution

Having facilitated ExperienceChange™ and ExperienceInnovation™ workshops within the executive university program for several years, Douglas recommended that the Associate Director use ExperienceChange™ for his hi-po group. He immediately realized it was the right solution, in more ways than one.

“We wanted to focus on experiences, not just courses. So I thought ExperienceChange™ was an awesome solution. It would allow them to go through a simulation and get real-world experience on how to recognize and influence change.”

Associate Director/
HR Business Partner

“We wanted to focus on experiences, not just courses,” he says. “So I thought ExperienceChange™ was an awesome solution. It would allow them to go through a simulation and get real-world experience on how to recognize and influence change.”

Identifying the program was only the first step, however. With participants dispersed across seven different cities, the Associate Director and Douglas realized they would need to get creative to come up with a way to deliver an engaging day-long virtual training experience to the entire group of approximately 80 participants.

The company was already using the technology platform telepresence for virtual meetings. Now they would test its capabilities by taking it to a new level of scale and complexity. In March of 2015, the Associate Director began the process, inviting participants and reserving the rooms for the program, which would take place that October. That kind of advanced planning would be the hallmark of the implementation he and Douglas organized.

“Preparation was essential,” says Douglas, who had the daunting task of facilitating to participants in 14 different telepresence rooms across seven different cities. “Detailed agendas, having HR business partners in the rooms and sending materials to the participants in advance were all helpful in making it successful.”

From that thorough planning and preparation emerged a unique, highly collaborative virtual learning experience.

“ExperienceChange™ is designed to be very collaborative, and the technology allowed participants to connect with each other—there was great value in having face-to-face dialogue,” the Associate Director says. “And because each room was a team, they could break out and then come back and talk about their experience, and everyone could see it.”

“This experience crystallized for this population why we’re doing what we’re doing from a leadership perspective and why they’re hearing this message over and over. It helped them understand the different stages of change rather than just reacting to change. Now that they’ve gone through it, I believe they’ll be able to recognize and lead when they are part of a broader change initiative.”

Associate Director/
HR Business Partner

Engagement was also high throughout the day and across the locations, thanks to Douglas’s deliberate, creative facilitation, which included activities like round robins, small team discussions, large group debriefs, “lightning rounds,” and other ways to change up the rhythm of the day and keep people on their toes.

And, the Associate Director adds, “once we got into the simulation, you could see their eyes light up. There was great engagement.”

Results

Although the program only recently wrapped, the Associate Director is confident the hi-pos who participated will be well positioned to step up when change comes their way. He believes that their awareness of change and their ability to lead change will benefit as a result of having participated in ExperienceChange™.

“The reason I love the program is that, while our leaders have done a very good job in setting the course for how we need to pivot as an organization, this experience crystallized for this population why we’re doing what we’re doing from a leadership perspective and why they’re hearing this message over and over,” he says. “It helped them understand the different stages of change rather than just reacting to change. Now that they’ve gone through it, I believe they’ll be able to recognize and lead when they are part of a broader change initiative.”

He says that the program also gave participants real-world practical experience, which makes for a more robust learning opportunity. By tackling an actual problem and implementing the change, they were able to see themselves and the reactions to change that they’ve seen in real life.

“It really hits home for them,” he says. “The reaction has been very positive.”

Linking back to the company's leadership competencies, Douglas says that the way the program blends both change and innovation has helped reinforce not just the change competency but also the innovation and collaboration competencies, creating even greater value and impact for this group.

And of course, there was the logistical feat of successfully delivering a highly interactive and collaborative program to 80 people across seven cities in one day. Douglas points to several factors that contributed to the success of this unique training experience:

- A robust technology platform
- HR business partners in each location to assist as necessary
- The agility of the facilitator and the HR BPs
- Engaged participants
- Creative methods for keeping energy levels high
- Soliciting participant reflections on the learnings as they happened

The Associate Director says that while they pushed the limits of their bandwidth and creativity to accomplish it, it was the right choice.

"We felt like it was a very good investment. We now have a subset of our hi-po population that is capable of recognizing and being better leaders of change."

About Kimberly Douglas and FireFly Facilitation, Inc.

Kimberly Douglas is President of FireFly Facilitation, Inc., a firm specializing in facilitation and training. After conducting a customized needs assessment, the FireFly team works closely with the client to design and deliver high-impact results. FireFly has recognized expertise in team development, staff meeting effectiveness and building the capabilities of leaders. Founded in 1998, the company has facilitated, trained and consulted in a broad cross-section of organizations, including AT&T, Coca-Cola, Home Depot, UPS and the U.S. Marine Corps.

About ExperienceInnovation™

ExperienceInnovation™ is an energizing workshop that challenges teams to flex their creativity to solve a realistic and complex design challenge. In so doing, they engage with the terms, techniques, and thought patterns of successful innovators.

ExperienceInnovation™ was created in collaboration with IDEO, an award-winning global design firm that takes a human-centered design approach to helping organizations in the public and private sectors innovate and grow.

About ExperienceChange™

ExperienceChange™ is an expert-guided experience that teaches a best-practice model for managing change. Backed by over 20 years of change research and industry insights, the experience enables leaders and managers to practice leading change and engage with the behaviors, tools and skills sets that make change happen.

ExperienceChange™ is the trusted tool for Fortune 500's and the world's leading business schools. It's the cornerstone of change initiatives that transform, leadership programs that enable, and learning events that inspire.

About ExperiencePoint

At ExperiencePoint, we're passionate about how people work together to get stuff done. We're an award winning training company that develops business simulations for leadership development in the areas of change and innovation. We're known for realistic simulation experiences that challenge people to roll up their sleeves and learn the Whats, Whys and Hows of leading change and innovation.