Fully-virtualized leadership development at a global chemical and sustainable technologies organization

In 2017, a leading global chemicals and sustainable technologies organization envisioned a cleaner and healthier world – both now and for future generations. Its leaders partnered with BTS to develop fundamental leadership skills for nearly 2,000 supervisors and managers, most of whom were transitioning from individual contributor to front-line leader. The objective was to equip them with the fundamental skills to develop their teams and lead them into the future, while maintaining critical alignment with the organization's vision, strategy, and values.

This program would be delivered across 19 countries and in greater than 10 languages; to leaders operating in every environment, from offices to the manufacturing floor; and across multiple shifts. It was crucial that all participants formed a consistent foundation of organization-specific behaviors, learning to lead themselves, others, and the business into the future.

- The two-part learning journey, called "Leading Delivery," featured blended-learning solutions and a custom, scenario-based simulation that encapsulated moments regularly encountered by participating leaders in reality. The journey's design was underpinned by a continuous learning loop and interspersed with manager touchpoints and self-reflection opportunities, all tied to business outcomes. To achieve credible, meaningful, and lasting results, participants were given "Go-Do's," or prescribed actions that make it easy to implement learning into the flow of work.
- Initially, "Leading Delivery" was launched using two modalities of delivery: digital learning that leveraged the organization's learning-management system, and also face-to-face workshops. However, a third modality, featuring virtual instructor-led workshops, emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. Going forward, the organization now has the option for hybrid deployment, enabling flexibility needed to help leaders working in different environments.

Fast-tracking virtualization

In response to the global pandemic, the organization made an early and bold shift by virtualizing the learning journey. BTS, in partnership with the organization's HR and Talent teams, also redefined the Leading Delivery journey to ensure its effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability. The content and learning objectives of the virtual Leading Delivery journey remained the same, as the original design and would have been delivered on Microsoft Teams.

- The team leveraged best practices around **neuroscience** and **adult learning** to define a pathway of smaller, bite-sized virtual workshops. These were complemented by "skills labs" that focused solely on the practical application of concepts introduced in the virtual workshops. The journey also used the simulation's leadership challenges and role-plays as means of practice, which they then built upon while facing real-life scenarios in the skills lab. For example, participants applied their new skill of giving and receiving feedback by working in pairs, acting out a realistic example by delivering difficult feedback. After the role-play, partners provided feedback and constructive criticism; participants were then expected to apply these role-played conversations.
- The team took the opportunity to supplement content that would support leaders in the current environment; providing, for example, additional resilience tools and context-creating learning debriefs suited to guiding their global and largely-remote team through a crisis.

Global virtual success

Due to the diversity of employees and working locations, there was always a need to virtualize the program. The onset of COVID-19, however, fast-tracked this need. It became critical for the virtual program to:

- Maintain engagement virtually
- Build networks across the organization
- Be the "stepsister" to face-to-face interaction, rather than second-best

BTS supported the digital deployment of "Leading Delivery" by:

- Working with the organization's technical teams to seamlessly integrate BTS solutions
- Providing a structured flow for the blended-learning journey
- Supplementing the journey with assets, such as animated videos, access to CrossKnowledge articles, relevant readings from GetAbstract, and BTS iLeads (self-paced simulations)
- Maximizing learning using platform features, such as a badge and point system
- Introducing gamification to engage the participants
- Measuring participant engagement

The impact

BTS provided the organization with insights into the "why" and "how" of successful virtual delivery, demonstrating an ability to quickly upskill and successfully engage with leaders in a virtual world. After all, this was the only leadership program virtualized during the pandemic.

Furthermore, the virtual setting allowed BTS to emphasize interactive elements of the journey. Instead of "sit-and-speak" webinars, BTS consultants facilitated active dialogues between peer participants, gleaning insight into leadership during 2020 and for all time. The successful delivery of a virtual leadership journey helped the organization reach its leadership development goals in a new environment, without compromising quality.

One aspect of BTS's impact measurement included a follow-up three months after the journey's end:

- Overall, 77%* agreed that the blended learning experience was driving **tangible impact and outcomes.**
- **91%** agreed that providing clarity on the link between individual and larger business objectives had improved the way in which they developed people and managed performance.
- **72%*** agreed that the learning outcomes were met.

*Average percentage from outcome data

Further affirming its impact during one of the most challenging times for leaders the world over, this program received a Brandon Hall Award, a distinction which recognizes organizations that have achieved measurable benefits through such successfully-deployed programs.

