



Projekt report: Management Potential Program at WM-Group

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- :: Project manager WM-Group: Thomas Sundermann
- :: Project manager flow consulting gmbh: Dieter Kannenberg and Frank Wippermann
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- :: Authors: Thomas Sundermann (WM-Group) and Dieter Kannenberg (flow consulting gmbh)
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The myth of self control

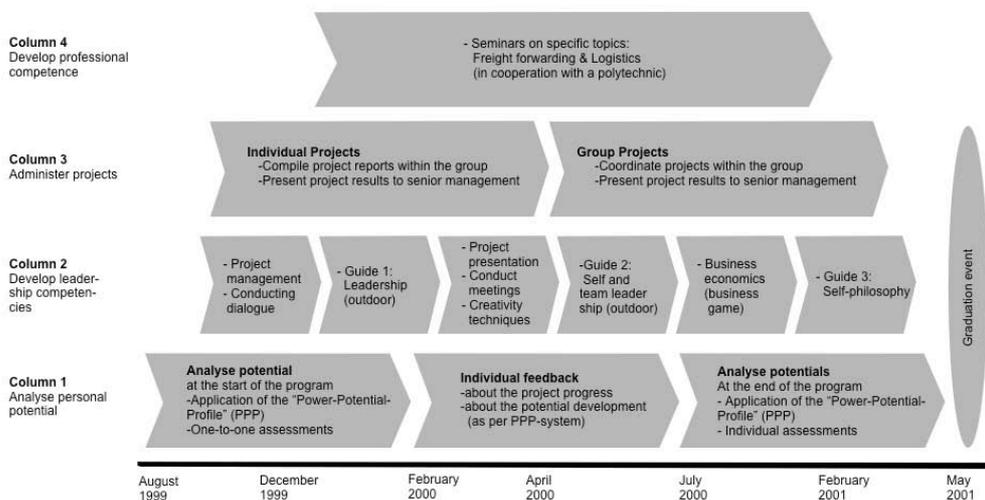
Business development: Leadership trainee program with the Power-Potential-Profile®

In the past, the world wide logistics group 'WM-group', with their head office in Bocholt, recruited all their new management from the open market. But, to find good managers with substantial experience is tough in this trade. Therefore, the company decided to generate their own in-house management personnel. To get there, eleven young, skilled and qualified employees were chosen to participate in a leadership trainee program.

These eleven participants were supposed to excel in all five leadership focused areas. Their mission was to prove their leadership skills, in order to take on a responsible management position within the company two years later. This career promotion into an adequate position was what the WM-group was offering - in the event of a successful participation throughout the program.

The development program was made up of four different parts.

Leadership-Trainee-Program at the WM-Group



1) Analyse the personal potential throughout individual feedback-dialogues. At the start of the program, every participant received a personal status quo by analysing his or her individual potential. This same analysis was then repeated 1,5 years later. All changes were documented. The analysis tool applied was the "power-potential-profile" (PPP).

2) Workshops focusing on leadership. Within 13 seminars, every participants "personal development potential" was inspired by selected topics. The leadership topic was highlighted from different angles. The topics included: project management, communication skills, leadership and team. These workshops took



into consideration: the learning experience of the group, the hands-on experience and work in actual projects. On top of this, some outdoor related activities provided new and challenging leadership situations.

3) Working in individual and group projects (within the 2 years). The participants were responsible for certain projects. The experiences made were integrated within the development program itself. An in-house projects manager was there to give advice. Throughout the workshops, the participants had the chance to talk about their experiences, learn new project management tools and to focus on current problems. The preliminary results had to be presented to the management board.

4) Seminars at a technical college, covering logistics subjects. The participants also attended courses at a technical college to gain specific knowledge about logistics and freight forwarders.

One of the main and intended side-effects of this program was, to create a better network of information within the WM-group because companies, whose constitution is too distributed, risk that the individual sectors separate too far from each other. The program was meant to counteract this trend.

The participating trainees came from different areas of the WM-group. Working together as a group generated a deeper understanding for different views and roles of each business unit. The efficiency of this network became apparent. Suddenly, one phone call to a colleague was enough to solve a problem, which in the past might have blocked some operating processes for weeks.

To face reality

The learning process did not only take place within the seminars and workshops, but also in real practice. Problems amongst the participants especially arose during the deployment of the projects. These were caused by two main factors:

1) Some of the expectations at the starting point of the projects were just too high. During the program, it became obvious that some participants had overestimated themselves in the projects or, the project itself was mistimed.

2) The euphoric learning experiences from the seminars and the knowledge that they had been chosen for leadership, misled some participants to false estimations of the economical environment. Within every business, there are different perceptions, hierarchical realities and long standing structures. The personal strategies wielding influence into projects need to consider these realities.

From our point of view, these experiences were important and inevitable. Only the confrontation with reality brings about essential experiences and these are important for personal development. Problems need to be challenging enough for a leader to grow and learn; to understand correlations and deal with them.



Learning dilemmas

The confrontation with reality, as well as the re-evaluation and integration of the experiences made, were important steps in the learning process. All leadership trainee programs entail learning dilemmas.

On one side, by inviting the participants to the program, they realise that the company thinks they are suitable. The motto is: "We have chosen you, because you are our primary employees". This leads to an ego boost. It creates a feeling of taking things for granted and this in turn gets in the way of learning.

Also, participants in these kind of programs are mainly young (all were under 30). They have gotten ahead with their studies and occupational career in a rapid development and have not yet experienced any critical conflict situations. High commitment and intention to act, but lacking the ability to reflect upon, was noticed.

Hence, it was important to integrate situations, where painful experiences had to be handled. The program claimed not to mediate superficial tools, but to initiate deeper learning. Debating difficulties in reality situations helped a lot. For example the experiences made, whilst trying to implement their projects in the real business context.

Outdoor-training intensifies the process

Outdoor trainings with detailed reflection periods intensified the learning process. The trainer created situations, in which the participants had to make decisions and confront themselves with complex leadership tasks in a challenging outdoor setting. Experiences in terms of cooperation, leadership, team and conflict management were made. All new learning experiences were dealt with in detailed reflection processes.

In particular situations that turned out to be not as successful as the rest of their career, had to be handled. Frustration and mistakes appeared. Now, the participants found themselves in situations where they had actually failed. Now, they could realise that this failure was somehow connected to their own behaviour patterns. This was a platform for self-knowledge.

The personal feedback from the potential analysis came into consideration and gained a better understanding. The instant and successful transformation of awareness within the following outdoor task, motivated the participants throughout the rest of the program.

Confirm individuality

Working with the analysing Power-Potential-Profile® turned out to be very beneficial in terms of the programs objectives. At the start, in June 1999, the participants received an individual feedback which took into consideration their personal preferences, their empowerment and behaviour patterns. The



profoundness of the Power-Potential-Profile® is what distinguishes it from other analysis. The tools used and connected were: the worldwide known MBTI personality model (Myers-Briggs-Type Indicator model) and also a recording of empowerment, behaviour and characterisation by a supervisor. These instruments all relate to each other, to a detailed personality picture and to reality itself. This is how feedback gains quality and profoundness. The repetition of this analysis 1,5 years later, enabled the participants to become aware of their own development.

5 keys to success

- 1) Providing personal position-fixing. Continuous and substantiated feedback from internal supervisors and external consultants throughout the whole program (using the Power-Potential-Profile® amongst other methods).
- 2) Precise, real time implementation of learning processes within the businesses reality. Accompanying project work – individually and within the group.
- 3) Experiencing direct leadership challenges. Trying out different leadership techniques in an outdoor setting and reflecting the process.
- 4) To provide a balance of self- and external validation. Both: orientation on the basis of well structured seminars and monitored project work – and: self dependent head scope for development, in order to construct self controlled project work with the ability to assert oneself.
- 5) To establish a transfer of learning experiences within the corporate culture and to integrate the supervisors.

The myth of self control

Whenever people are trained to act as responsible and leading managers, the methods used should agree with the result. Hence, it turns out to be common, that when a high potential program is introduced, the participants themselves are supposed to be the directors. They chose the contents, which they believe are important.

But, from all programs in the past we know, there is no such pure self control within a group: The budget is limited by the company. What the business requests, will have to influence and restrict the groups decisions. Projects need to be realised and someone from management needs to coordinate the whole program.

And here lies the problem: without the actual knowledge about leadership concepts or without understanding of how the personality develops in a dynamic



way; without co-relating the contents with the companies' objectives, the chances for choosing the adequate tools, are minor. The likeliness that any chosen potpourri of seminar topics is chosen is too high. Whatever is trendy or fun enough, might solve certain problems, but might also mislead the participants.

This is why we said: each and every learning group was supposed to receive tools to affect the process themselves, by all means. For them to prove their individual responsibilities and self leadership. But, the people who initiated the program with a definite objective, needed to coordinate, consult and control deliberately. And part of this, was to determine contents, define learning structures or integrate supervisors.

The participants say:

My overall impression...

- < It is a commendation to be participating in this program
- < We keep good company among each other
- < I would sure do it again

My ideas...

- < To integrate all activities even more into the working context
- < To sustain the support and network with the supervisors

My personal learning experiences...

- < Performance and implementation is always possible
- < I have experienced valuable personal leadership behaviour
- < It is important for me to know where I am at
- < It was a good combination of experience and evaluation

My learning experiences within the group...

- < We have seen ourselves in many unexpected situations
- < The group has overcome great difficulties together
- < I have got to know my own limitations
- < The group dynamics were put to the test
- < We have gained a lot of faith in each other

Participants as promoters

The WM-group is very pleased with the programs' results. The managing partner Hans-Wilhelm Löhler pointed out that "not only the personal development of each participant was positive, but also the overlapping communication within the company improved a lot." Eleven participants engaged in the program, ten of them stayed with it. With all of them, the next career step was agreed. Some of them were promoted to responsible management positions even before the program was finished.



From the participants' point of view, the personal learning process considering the leadership qualifications was particularly significant.

The WM-group evaluated all experiences from this successful and challenging leadership trainee program. Then, a second round was formed, the experiences from the first program taken into account. Some colleagues from the first program now promote and support the new group. But these new participants of course, have to make their personal experiences.

The networking and spreading of internal information about the program is improving constantly. The participants' supervisors attend certain parts of the program. This way, the program itself has a growing impact on the entire company.

The participants keep in close contact and thereby promote the networking, cooperation and teamwork within the company. They were able to convert their personal experiences in an effective way. They approached their leadership tasks realistically and did not overestimate themselves. They have extended their leadership qualities and have applied their expertise in a much more responsible way. The reflective moments in their everyday life as managers have increased.

This gives them a chance to operate in a dynamic developing environment and to attend to their future management tasks with success.

The WM GROUP

The WM-group in Bocholt is a medium-sized group of companies that operate worldwide. With 40 enterprises in 8 European countries and more than 50 years of expertise in logistics, the WM-group offers innovative service. The modular concept of products offers freight forwarding, ultra-modern warehouse logistics and the latest in information technologies. New-foundations and purchases caused an increase in employees amongst the now 40 affiliated companies, both at home and abroad; the WM-group counts more than 1700 employees.

Authors:

Thomas Sundermann, Human Resources, WM GROUP, Am Gut Baarking, 46395 Bocholt, Germany

Dieter Kannenberg, flow consulting gmbh, Spörckenstraße 89, 29221 Celle, Germany