



Client: National Savings and Investments
Assignment: Deliver a leadership development programme that mirrors five-year business strategy

Strategy and brand shapes leadership team development

NS&I is an organisation on the move. With over £84 billion of investments and 25 million customers, it comfortably met its targets in 2007. Then, with a new five-year strategy of 'Adding Value', it started the next stage of its continuous improvement journey.

The organisation was well placed to move ahead, with the strategic direction underpinned by a clear vision, brand values and behaviours. But the executive team realised that leaders and senior managers would have to demonstrate very different qualities if they were to succeed in building a low-cost, value adding organisation at the sharp end of the financial services turmoil.

The public tender to deliver Leadership Development for the team over three years was highly competitive, with nearly 100 proposals. In addition, NS&I already knew us as Lean experts from an earlier collaboration on operational process improvements – a challenge for us initially as we had to persuade them we had more performance improvement strings to our bow.

Our Approach

We won the contract because we proposed a solution that focused on developing the organisational leadership requirements, not just generic leadership competencies. These were directly linked to the "Adding Value" and brand strategies. We also focused on ensuring that leadership development resulted in positive organisational impact and improved performance of individuals and teams.

Getting Started

Delivering on these criteria was never going to be easy. Certainly, a generic development programme was not the answer. So, working with the internal HR team, we started by diagnosing how the performance of the leaders was currently assessed as a way to develop a new competency framework more closely aligned to the needs of the business.

To do this we drew on four areas:

- The objectives of the business strategy: to Simplify and Build, Improve and Leverage, Grow and Harvest
- Perceived brand values: Security, Straightforwardness, Integrity
- Three supporting brand behaviours: a human touch, pace and confidence
- Best industry practice.

We also analysed each individual during a bespoke development centre, using techniques such as Group exercises, one to one interviews and personality profiling that included 360 degree feedback. Overall, this portrayed a leadership team that was in its comfort zone when it came to making long-term decisions, but needed to develop skills and behaviours to build pace and operate with greater confidence in the short-term.

Together, this gave the senior management team a meaningful narrative for their own personal development, as individuals and as a group. Each manager now has an agreed personal development plan. Each directorate has an understanding of their collective development challenges. The business as a whole has a clear understanding of the leadership development challenges to improve performance.

Building leadership capability

The programme for developing the leaders is now in place. By blending personal and group development with behavioural and skills development, we are addressing the needs of those who need new approaches of how to lead with those who need fine tuning in their application of their existing skills.

Over 30 senior managers have embarked upon an integrated programme that involves Master Classes (sessions led by external experts), whole group conferences (how to apply methods and make it work at NS&I), performance coaching (to improve personal application and focus on specific aspects of individual leadership and mentoring (learning from other leaders). This programme is stretching and challenging, focusing on high performance in leadership and teams.

We have built the programme around our pragmatic model for effective leadership: Focus, Structure, Discipline and Ownership. During the programme, participants are aiming to be effective transformational and transactional leaders. The results will assist on delivering both 'pace' and 'confidence' as well as enabling the continued development of a low cost business delivering benefits to customers and stakeholders.

Managing for success

As a major programme of work, we have applied a level of project management that will ensure appropriate governance without stifling activity and progress. A steering group which involves the Chief Executive, the Director, Channel Delivery & Management (Operations), the Director of People and Environment and the Head of Learning and Development, was established and leads the programme. Bourton integrate project management with activity planning and delivery to ensure value for money. This ensures that the programme remains topical and flexible, and that any organisational issues are recognised and addressed in 'real time'.

Value delivered

The programme is designed as a supporting and challenging process to enable NS&I to deliver its 'Adding Value' strategy. During an initial phase, the programme has provided clear focus on what needs to improve and established a process to support that improvement. The organisation now has more clearly defined organisational competencies which underpin the programme. Individuals have a clear development path and a programme of support to help them tackle their own development areas. There is a recognition that the culture of the organisation has to change and the role that the leadership team has to play in achieving that shift.

The programme of masterclasses and workshops are providing the framework for new thinking. Group conferences are providing the process to apply this new thinking to the workplace. Focused coaching is providing support and challenge to individuals to improve performance.

The organisation and its leadership team are now best placed to grow over the next two years of the development programme.