Global Professional Services Organization Success Story

Situation

An internationally known professional services organization with global reach, a globally dispersed workforce, and a history of providing innovative solutions with a very high degree of satisfaction was facing a serious problem. 99% of their effectiveness came from the knowledge, skills, and abilities of their workforce. These capabilities "walked out of the office each evening". The HR department reviewed their workforce and noted that 25% of their workforce was eligible to retire within 2 months, 50% were eligible to retire in five years, and almost 75% were eligible to retire in ten years. The organization would be losing a significant % of leaders in mission critical roles.

As the HR executive noted, "We have to have a lottery ticket backup plan. If some of our people win the lottery, they would be out of here and we don't have as good a bench as we think we need. We need people in strong individual contributor roles who can think and anticipate what those on the operational side need, what their managers need, and how to look at situations through the lenses of their management, all the while maintaining and enhancing the highest level of personal leadership. We need to nurture them with the idea that leadership is a set of behaviors, not a role in the organization."

The HR section lead continued, "If we look at where we might be in the next five to ten years, we need to start now to help our top contributors understand the larger strategic context of the organization, how their roles contribute to the mission, and how their personal leadership behaviors have a compelling and enduring impact on our success."

The Approach

They turned to the NCSU Shelton Leadership Center and the Poole College of Management's Executive Education group to help design a customized approach to their rapidly evolving set of development activities. They wanted to create an effective partnership, rather than turning the entire operation over to an outside organization. The Shelton-Poole teams began with talking to multiple stakeholders at the client's site, ranging from the C-Suite executives to likely program participants in the organization. Based upon these discussions, the NCSU team suggested some possible program designs to achieve the results that the organization desired.

The design was co-developed by the NCSU-client team, resulting in a model that would effectively achieve the desired development goals. In some cases, the best person for delivery was somebody internal to the client. In other cases, the client wanted external expertise and perspective to offer research based frameworks and models that have been successfully applied to other organizations facing a similar set of challenges. The SLC/PCOM team then looked for the best subject matter experts to provide the right experience.

The entire SLC/PCOM team went through a final briefing with the client four weeks prior to the initial program to ensure that the objectives, content, supplementary materials, and frameworks all linked together. This meeting also focused on a rigorous cross-reference to ensure there were no gaps between the anticipated program design and the objectives of the client organization. This group included the external subject matter experts who would provide the external

perspective, the internal subject matter experts who would provide the inside perspective, and the client sponsors.

Results

Upon completion of the first iteration of the program, each of the participants evaluated the program content as well as how well the program helped them reinforce and apply personal leadership skills to their area within the organization. The organization also completed a post program interview protocol with selected members of the client organization.   The program's overall evaluation was rated 4.9 on a five point scale, with 99% of the participants recommending the program to their peers.

The client organization then decided to expand this program to another group (current first and second line managers and supervisors to within the organization), to help them be prepared to step into a more senior management role within the next 3 years.

Lessons Learned from Our Experience

1. Assess the skills you need both now and in the next 5-10 years. They will likely be a different set of skills.
2. What are the critical capabilities you anticipate needing to achieve the organization's mission?
3. What is the current state of your workforce? Do they have the requisite skills and knowledge (both technical and personal leadership)?
4. What does the review of your bench strength and demographics in five years look like?. Do you have a set of two or three people for each of the critical roles that can step in and keep that part of the organization humming?
5. Do your current development activities achieve the organizational mission? Are there gaps?