

Developing and Deploying Leadership Development

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TriWest Healthcare Alliance deployed a strategic leadership development program to enable optimal effectiveness throughout the organization.

As a Department of Defense contractor since 1996, the sole business of TriWest Healthcare Alliance is to manage the delivery of Tricare, the military's health care entitlement, to active duty and retired service members and their families.

Having served the military community in Tricare's West region, TriWest was awarded its second five-year contract in 2001. Under the new contract, the company's scope of responsibility expanded from serving 16 states to 21, adding more than 1 million Tricare-eligible customers to support. In turn, the number of employees required to support the new contract nearly doubled, creating a great deal of change, not to mention volumes of training required for new and veteran employees transitioning to new roles, responsibilities and faces.

In response to leadership challenges inherent with such growth, TriWest embarked on designing and deploying a comprehensive leadership development program. The first step was establishing a leadership development department. This department integrated the company's existing training function and changed its reporting structure to report directly to the CEO, independent of the human resources department.

Concept to Implementation

The guiding idea behind the leadership development program was that if leaders are not successful in mastering the required skills and behavioral changes when transitioning from individual contributor to first-level manager, that leadership deficit will impact their effectiveness all the way up the leadership ladder. It was decided that the leadership program would focus on the first transition point.

A model was developed based on four leadership fundamentals that would drive all leadership training and development activities: leadership skills, management skills, internal knowledge of the organization and external knowledge (e.g., what is happening in the world at large that could impact the company).

To teach these fundamentals to the organization's leadership, a variety of tools and strategies were introduced. For the leadership component, TriWest selected a tool that aligned the level of employee competence and commitment to a specific task with the most effective leadership style. By using this tool, leaders could customize their leadership style for a specific task to encourage maximum productivity and performance by their staff.

For the management skills area, various short courses based on management competencies were developed and delivered in classroom and Web-based settings. Topics included time, meeting, performance and financial management.

A monthly publication highlighting relevant environmental topics was created and distributed to leaders to address internal and external knowledge.

As the components of the initial model were deployed in the organization, the need to provide a more structured and focused leadership approach became apparent. Furthermore, due to the diversity in leadership responsibilities and experience, there was no common leadership language spoken in the organization. The original model needed to be developed further to provide a comprehensive foundation and drive a common leadership language.

Changing Behaviors

In the updated model, the management section retained its focus on management skills, but additional emphasis was placed on the hiring process. The company used a selection tool that helped to predict employee behavioral strengths and motivators, but many leaders had not been trained on it. As more was learned about the tool, more applications for the information surfaced. In particular, the information dovetailed with the leadership tool already in place.

For example, a particular supervisor was not performing well. A diagnosis of her leadership skills indicated she had the commitment to do her job, but she lacked the competency to be an effective leader. A profile of her 18-member team was created using the behavioral assessment tool. It was concluded that her ineffectiveness was not due to a lack of competence but rather to the extremely diverse behavioral makeup of her team. As a result, her team was restructured to better leverage natural behavioral strengths and skills. This resulted in a team that was effective, and overall performance improved.

The powerful relationship between the behavioral assessment and skill diagnosis tools was an "aha" moment and led to the training of leaders on how to incorporate the information from both tools to increase personal and team effectiveness. By relating this behavioral information to one another, leaders began to see the strong connection between their level of self-awareness and level of team effectiveness. This enhanced self knowledge helped leaders better understand themselves, manage individual team conflicts and create strategies to improve overall effectiveness.

As the training of the model's components continued, it became clear that the model needed to reflect the human behavioral component of leadership, not just the technical aspects. Because behaviors originate in beliefs and values, a values component was added to the new version of the model. Training for leaders included an exploration of individual values and beliefs and their alignment with the company mission, vision and values.

To illustrate and measure the value and effectiveness of the new model, TriWest applied individual model components to the areas in the company that were experiencing significant turnover. The information gleaned from each component helped identify the root cause of the attrition. For example, by using information from the behavioral assessment tool in a longitudinal study of the people who left one area of the company, a 93 percent predictability model for attrition was created based on an individual's behavioral pattern. This validated behavioral pattern has become part of the selection process for employees in this department. Additionally, focused training and coaching of first-line supervisors was provided to help them be more effective. This effort, combined with an emphasis on the associated components of the model, has helped reduce attrition in the targeted department from approximately 35 percent to less than 25 percent.

Moving Forward

The final phase in the development of the new version of the leadership model added an intelligence component. Intelligence was defined as a leader's ability to take his or her life experiences and relate them to the nature of the job. For example, if an individual had solid leadership experience, that experience would transfer to a job never done before and the leader could learn the jargon and technical aspects of the job.



Data Point

By using the information provided by the behavioral assessment tool in a longitudinal study of the people who left one area of the company, a 93 percent predictability model for attrition was created based on an individual's behavioral pattern.

As more was learned about the significant role of emotional intelligence in leadership effectiveness, emotional intelligence was substituted for intelligence as a more inclusive term. Leaders were taught the basic theory and components of emotional intelligence to gain an understanding of their own level of emotional intelligence and how it impacts leadership effectiveness.

TriWest also developed a leadership certification program in partnership with the human resources department. Combining the leadership model components, HR policies and procedures, and the behavioral assessment tools, TriWest developed and implemented a five-day classroom program to provide experiential development. A pre-assessment of current levels of HR and leadership knowledge and application of the model and tools is conducted along with a post-test to measure the lift in knowledge. To further emphasize the program's content, the company designed a custom management game to serve as a catalyst for the synthesis and reinforcement of the concepts, tools and model taught during the five-day program.

The leadership model has evolved into a tool to drive effective individual and team performance. All leadership training, consultations, assessments and coaching reinforce one or more of the model's components, thus avoiding the temptation of flavor-of-the-month trends. This is essential to create a strong foundation of leadership skills and drive a common leadership language in the organization.

TriWest is in the process of competing for its next contract. As with the two previous contract transitions, this transition brings inevitable leadership challenges, with changes in personnel, roles and responsibilities. But this transition is different. The time and effort spent over the past five years deploying the leadership model throughout the company resulted in a leadership team that is better prepared to understand and manage the impact of a new contract. Leaders are more aware of their behaviors and how they impact their personal and team effectiveness. Furthermore, they have been trained to use a tool to help them identify and deal with issues such as trust, change and conflict. By working each of the model components and applying the information to themselves and their teams, they will minimize any dips and will return to full productivity more quickly than in past transitions.

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