



Leadership Program for Akzo Nobel Decorative Coatings Europe

According to Paul Woldendorp, Director of Human Resources at Akzo Nobel Decorative Coatings Europe: “

We at Akzo Nobel Decorative Coatings Europe put great value on developing our employees. 'Our people' is one of the focus points in our vision, mission and value statement.”

Once we had formulated this starting point and had developed the necessary set of instruments such as the assessment system, we realized that there was still a further step that had to be taken to actually get behaviour change. How do we translate this desire to a teaching program that will give actual results in the different countries? We also recognize that in Europe there are differences in, for example, hierarchy and company culture. We know for instance that behaviour change takes place differently in Germany than it does in Italy.

We called in Schouten & Nelissen and in close collaboration with their advisors we found a solution: A training program that allowed translation of our vision, mission, values and the set of instruments that were developed centrally, to the local people, culture and situation in all countries. This was all done in consultation with local trainers, professionals and HR managers”.

Criteria for a successful training intervention

In order to make the intended change possible, a number of criteria for success were designated in advance:

1. More attention from managers for the personal and career development of individuals (realize value)

When managers are convinced in practical terms that increased attention to individuals not only benefits the person, but also benefits the level of effort, performance, involvement with the aims of the department and the entire company, they will be prepared to give this attention in practice. The advantages for the business will be demonstrated in sessions organized for managers.

2. Devoting attention in practice (applying skills)

Benefits can be gained during the most important operational encounters between managers and staff. These encounters are:

- Annual contract interview: discussion of annual plan: the targets for the forthcoming years and the development of the individual, job and career
- The biannual job assessment interview – is the employee on course?
- The evaluation interview (annual – after completion of an assignment)
- Task designation at work
- Regular work consultation
- Discussion of reports
- Encouraging/corrective meetings
- Informal feedback

The performance of managers during these encounters must be enhanced. These encounters constituted the content of the training. Skill levels were boosted during the training. Theory was only provided in the form of e.g. a Quick Reference Guide.



3. Anchoring this reinforced attention in the monitoring conducted by managers.

Each improvement must be anchored in the persons implementing the change. Improvements will be permanent if the management supports managers by setting targets, requiring reports, conducting evaluations, correcting and encouraging, and making this improvement project a permanent agenda point. In addition to the BU management putting these concepts into practice in their daily operations, they must also keep the improvement project on their agenda permanently.

4. The responsibility of HRM to observe

HRM spots anyone with flagging attention (this is very understandable) and provides solutions: coaching, extra training etc.

Design of the project

Design specifications

- The same plan, in broad terms, throughout Akzo Nobel DCE. Variations on the basis of: group managers, language and culture, primary process
- Modular set-up: basics and special elements. Basics must be repeatedly applied in every practical discussion.
- Offered in modules of one shift per subject. Modules are sequential and can therefore not be followed separately
- Local implementation in the national language and suitable for the local culture.
- To guarantee local commitment, local management is consulted in a meet & greet with the local trainers and during the trainers meeting. Purpose of the trainers meeting is to make the "translation" from the European 'Mother'-draft to the local draft.
- Content linked to daily practice
- The Akzo Nobel DCE vision, mission, value concepts must be integrated
- Suitable for the RGM management style.
- Link to the discussions/interviews already used.
- Three managerial levels: top – middle and supervisors/group leaders.
- Top-down: managers provide the example
- Supervisors/group leaders have been given little or no attention in their managerial positions. Pay them a lot of personal attention.
- In small groups and protected environments: group size: maximum 10
- Close to the workplace: practical
- Anchoring in people and anchoring in management habits.

Modules overview

The scheme was offered in 2 forms: a basic version consisting of module 1 – 8, and an extended version: the basic scheme, plus 2 extra modules.

Each module (a 4-hour session) was preceded by concrete homework assignments and concluded with the determination of personal actions. The period between the training days (of 2 modules) was 4-6 weeks. This in order to facilitate ongoing learning during this period.

Kick off

In this module, the scheme was presented to the participants, partially by representatives from within the organization. This module also devoted a great deal of attention to the identification of personal development and associated learning goals.

Finally, situational leadership was discussed and practiced.

Task and goal setting

Attention to individual formulation of SMART aims, result-oriented management and making result-oriented agreements with staff.

Informal feedback

The basic feedback rules and especially a great deal of practice in giving informal feedback, therefore at moments that are not linked to specific types of discussions.

Evaluation and appraisal

Exercises in conducting evaluation interviews, possibly involving the use of an evaluation form.



Career development

Possible career development was viewed in various ways in terms of employability and the use of career anchors. This was followed by discussion exercises

Departmental coordination

The 'team effectiveness model' was used to study the optimisation of cooperation between departments from the perspective of personal situations and relations with other departments. Here too, discussions resulting from the analysis were practiced.

Sharing information

How, when and where do you inform your staff about important events? The model used to explain processes was the drama triangle from the Transactional Analysis.

Personal Development Interview

This interview was practiced with the aid of the STAR method. Reference was also made to Competence Management and the use of competences in this type of interview.

Succession planning

An analysis of Succession Plans used was the basis for the examination of the basis of these plans. "Have both the functional and personal options of the department been included?" These interviews were also practiced.

Organization development

How can you be enterprising with (the people in) your department? What is correct and what requires change is studied with the aid of the Quinn layout (used in the kick-off to ascertain personal development) - "what does this change look like and what must I do as a manager to achieve it?"

Material support

The emphasis was on exercises: behaviour must be made habitual. Practical support provided only by a Quick Reference Guide.

Organisation

In close cooperation with Akzo Nobel DCE Schouten & Nelissen designed a project plan based on central objectives and aiming for local results. S&N designed a 'Mother'-program for Akzo Nobel DCE. Both a Dutch and an international pilot were delivered by S&N to check the program on suitability, content wise and culturally. S&N facilitated the local sessions in all different countries, in which S&N, the local (HR)responsible from Akzo Nobel and the local trainer participated.

During this sessions the mother program was "translated" to a local program, adapted to local customs, while preserving the main themes. Of course all programs were also translated to the local language. S&N handled the scheme throughout Europe. The local Akzo Nobel DCE business units were responsible for the local organization. During the rollout of the project S&N monitored the results.

Evaluation

With this program we have realized a first step in a culture change. Participants are very well aware of the necessity of more attention from managers for the personal and career development of individuals. They realize the value of this. Furthermore they have made a first step in changing behaviour. They have started using their new skills and they have started to reflect on their own people management skills. This is what was noticed and told by colleagues, employees and managers.

The impact of the number of people trained had another very strong effect as well: the training introduced a "new common language" to discuss performance and behaviour in the company. While all managers participated, they were all familiar with the same concepts and started using and applying them. This had a strong positive impact on anchoring the change in the company. Performance is now subject to discussion within Akzo Nobel DCE.

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