

CASE STUDY

Development for high potentials: Barratt Developments work in partnership with Xancam to build a successful future



BARRATT
DEVELOPMENTS PLC

The Challenge

As Britain's best known housebuilder, Barratt recognises the need for strong business leadership to maintain growth and sustain its successful position. So in 2007, ahead of the current competitive climate and market challenges, Barratt took the proactive decision to adopt a more customer focussed and retail orientated mindset, and they looked to their top talent to lead the business forward.

Gareth Jones, Head of Talent, Barratt Developments explains, "We needed a high potential programme to develop our senior leaders of the future. We wanted them to reach their full potential as rapidly as possible. But creating the cutting edge programme that we needed wasn't something we could do internally- we needed to find a partner that could support us in design and delivery and Xancam provided that vital component."

The driving force behind this innovative step was HR Director, Jayne Mee and Head of Talent Gareth Jones. Xancam were invited in to work closely in creating a first class programme that would take Barratt's high potential leaders and develop their leadership capability for the future.

What did the programme look like?

Early conversations with senior stakeholders in the business shaped the leadership development process and defined the desired business outcomes.

David Langdon, Director, Xancam explains, "Based on our leading edge model of high potential, xpotential™, the first step was to define the key differentiators of leadership for Barratt. To start with we consulted with the most senior people in the business to identify the main business challenges over the next 3 -5 years and then explored with them how the business needed to respond in order to remain successful. Using that information, we were then able to build a comprehensive picture of the key leadership attributes required for the future."

These key differentiators were then used to create a high potential assessment which gave individuals the opportunity to assess their future potential alongside their line manager's view. The results of the process identified 15 individuals, all of which were senior leaders within the business. These people were then taken through to the next stage - a structured leadership development programme which reflected the future business challenges and, using Xancam's unique

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xtreme™ methodology, was geared specifically to the learning needs of high potentials. The development programme was named APEX, in keeping with the ‘top level of a house’. The spirit of the programme was to create a learning environment where high potentials were stretched and supported to reach their maximum potential. The programme was structured around three key workshops – 1) Strategic Leadership, 2) Emotional Intelligence, 3) Leading Change. Running alongside the structured leadership programme participants gained further insight from a bespoke 360 feedback process which formed the basis for pairing up the delegates with coaches who were specifically chosen according to their individual needs.

Gareth explains, “We wanted to create a programme that would be different, stimulating and challenging. We made sure that we included the 3 core development areas that are required to create cutting edge leaders of the future. We placed great emphasis on leading through change as a result of our current market situation and evolved the programme to meet the changing market circumstances to better equip the leaders on the programme with coping strategies for now and the future.” David and Gareth collaborated continuously, tweaking and evolving the programme in response to the market conditions and also alongside the needs of the delegates themselves.

One of the truly unique elements of the programme was the “Dragon’s Den” event which took place between

the first and second workshops. Participants were prepared for this experience during the first workshop which gave them the opportunity to cover core skills such as how to pitch a great idea to the ‘dragons’, strategic and creative thinking, and how to create a business plan that was truly viable. They were further supported by actors who enabled them to practise their presentational and pitching skills. David Langdon comments, “We set up the event so that people formed teams and had to work out together the best business idea that they felt would deliver great value back to the organisation. They then had to pitch their idea to the dragons - the CEO, CFO, HRD, two Executive Directors, and the Sales and Marketing Director. The dragons challenged each group and the sessions were lively and energetic.”

Some truly innovative ideas were born and backed! These ideas have since been integrated into the business. David continues, “Thanks to the leadership development programme the top people in the business came together to challenge the teams on their ideas, and brought with them the decision making power to say ‘yes’! This made the learning both powerful and real.”

Gareth Jones comments, “The Dragons Den created an exciting energy and a demanding environment for our delegates to present a business case back to the Board. This demonstrates the unique commitment from our Board members who have given their time in this way. Three fantastic ideas

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have arisen so far – all of which have been adopted in the business which is a clear demonstration of ROI.”

The leadership development programme combined classic tools, traditional methods and models around the core qualities of emotional intelligence, strategic thinking and learning and change, but the key difference lay in the way in which these high potential individuals were stretched using hard hitting skill structures and actors to enable them to practice their skills around conflict, persuading and leading others through tough times. When it came to strategic content, Xancam spent a number of days designing high quality business case studies for the participants to work through that were directly related to their industry. David Langdon explains, “The programme provided a great complexity of information and required the high potentials to stand up and be counted. At appropriate times throughout the programme there was the opportunity to review and reflect and realise how they do things and why and also an ongoing personal development plan is tweaked accordingly so that they can look back at the business and see what they need to do differently. ”

Another highly innovative technique required the participants to present back business metrics on the ROI of their leadership development. By asking them to provide evidence on how the business has benefited from their leadership development the proof rests with the participant.

Gareth Jones explains, “It became clear as we went along that it would be great to allow the delegates to celebrate their success in front of a very discerning audience. I’ve always aspired to have this “can do, will help” attitude from the executives and it is wonderful to get this level of commitment. In terms of immediate ROI we’ve seen fantastic changes in some delegates as they are already ready for promotion to a senior level in the organisation.”

Each of the workshop sessions was co-facilitated by David Langdon and Gareth Jones. David Langdon comments, “This was particularly powerful as I was able to draw on my external perspective from working with many other organisations, and Gareth had the inside story and provided really effective insight into internal challenges. This partnership approach has stretched all the way through the process. All our delegates found it really enjoyable but equally, extremely challenging.” Gareth continues, “A key element to the success of this programme has been the relationship between David and me, and I value his input, energy and application to doing a great job very highly, it’s been a fantastic situation to be in. We wouldn’t be where we are today without Xancam and their support. David and I have worked really well together and have been highly focused on what we need to do.”

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Business Impact/Results

The Leadership Development programme has had a big impact on the business already and has undoubtedly raised the awareness of development in an organisation where culturally development was not necessarily the norm. A key factor in the programme's success was the fact that it brought people at the top of the organisation together to have great conversations across the geographical span of the business. David remarks, "At the very top there is drive and sponsorship around the importance of leadership, this is unique but very powerful and will drive more success through this programme than any other factor. You need the top people to believe in it and support it, and this will drive a greater return from their leadership investment than anything else."

"Barratt are increasing their investment in development of their high potential leaders, despite business challenges in the current climate and this is testament to how strongly they believe that leadership will make a difference. They are developing their leaders to be the best they can be; their belief and faith in leadership is amazing. It has been great to work with them. At Xancam we feel privileged to work with an organisation who takes development of their high potential leaders so seriously."

4 Golden rules for developing high potentials:

1

Identify development priorities rigorously – by starting with an in-depth assessment you can accurately pin-point each person's development needs and avoid the sheep dip.

2

Acknowledge uniqueness – although there are general areas of development that all future leaders can benefit from, the more bespoke the development, the more likely it is to deliver ROI.

3

Make it hard-hitting and challenging – high potentials are a demanding group; they eschew mainstream development solutions in favour of those that really stretch, push and challenge them.

4

Avoid a lop-sided approach to delivery – to create rounded development, use a balanced blend of: thinking strategically; handling emotions and leading through change.

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