

Case Study: Expanding Management Foundations

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Alan Todd ^(✉)
Corp/U, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
atodd@corpu.com

1 Background

Managers serve as change agents, at least that is how Merck sees them. Merck is a global healthcare company that delivers innovative health solutions through its prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies, and animal health products. Merck's Leadership Development team was looking to capitalize on an opportunity to reshape its existing Management Foundations Program, initially developed a decade ago. This Program is designed to rapidly upskill newly-minted people managers to drive business [through improved strategic awareness], better understand and develop the self [biases and resilience], and lead others [coaching, performance, goals, leading teams] within the first six months in their new role.

The company overall was introducing and implementing a new enterprise-wide strategy as well as a new Performance Management process, making the timing right and necessary to help managers execute, innovate, and adapt.

Previously, Merck's learning program was primarily classroom-based/instructor-led training. This type of delivery was extremely expensive, and required new managers to expend numerous hours away their from work. In addition, the travel requirements and limited number of available offerings sometimes resulted in new managers not having an opportunity to take advantage of the program. This led Merck to partner with Corp/U to develop a new training program that would not only help engage more leaders, but help drive change.

The Corp/U Organizational Learning System (OLS) helps build organizational capabilities, drive change, and deliver value to customers through innovation. Integrated with social technology, a network of experts, and analytics, OLS is designed build new capacity of entire leadership teams in a way that is fun, collaborative, and tailored to business needs. Corp/U's Organizational Learning System takes a very human approach to digital experiences, and by doing so, helps organizations create more impact in less time.

Merck challenged itself to expand the Management Foundations curriculum in order to better meet the needs of the company's new strategy, efficiently and effectively develop new managers, serve as an input to their overall change management approach, and demonstrate a clear return-on-investment.

2 Design Leadership Program

Merck was interested in effectively onboarding newly-minted managers to drive organizational strategic goals, build capabilities necessary for success in the role, and build greater speed to effective leadership in an ongoing, resource-driven community of practice by connecting new managers, building networks across divisions and regions, and sharing best practices through a collaborative approach while learning.

Most specifically, Merck focused on progress toward the following three goals for managers with tenure of less than six months:

1. A change in perspective. Merck wanted to create a program that broadened the mindset of new managers as they developed them from individual contributor to people-manager who would also serve as change agents in executing on the organization’s new strategy. Through Corp/U’s platform, Figure 1 shows how Merck was able to measure managers’ capabilities for serving as change agents by identifying who had the following key qualities: the interest (commitment, advocacy), ability (understanding) and reach (influence, authority) to champion and implement change.
2. An emphasis on strategic knowledge. Merck required a program that would ensure the development of skills and behaviors that would effectively execute on and support a new strategy. Corp/U’s analysis (see Figure 2) showed that commitment to apply learned organizational strategy knowledge and skills to lead people was very high.
3. An agile learning offering. Merck desired a learning program that would foster growth, while also being simple to modify in a virtual format. Flexibility to alter content was necessary, since the new strategy was being delivered while people were being developed to execute on each component.

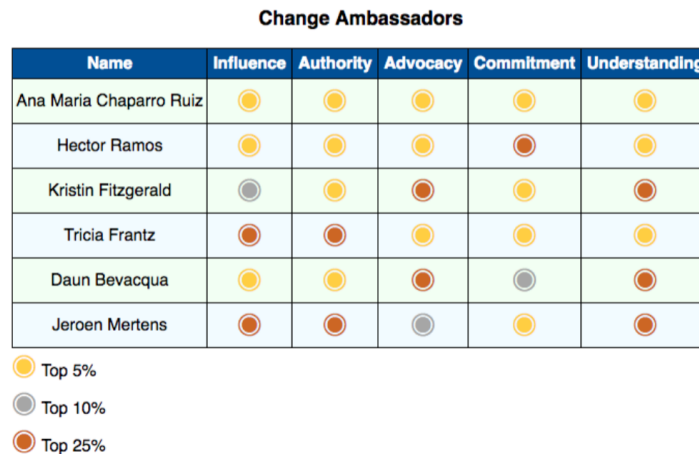


Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

Finally, an overall goal for the Merck team was to improve demonstrable return-on-investment by showing direct and indirect value using data analytics. The Corp/U program provides superior access to feedback and analytics to show the impact of learning.

3 Program Delivery

Delivery was a critical decision for this program as the target audience has a very busy schedule and is constantly absorbing a variety of cultural, technical, and commercial changes. The original course was designed as nine weeks of content spread over four months and focused on critical/essential content to the program (see Figure 3).

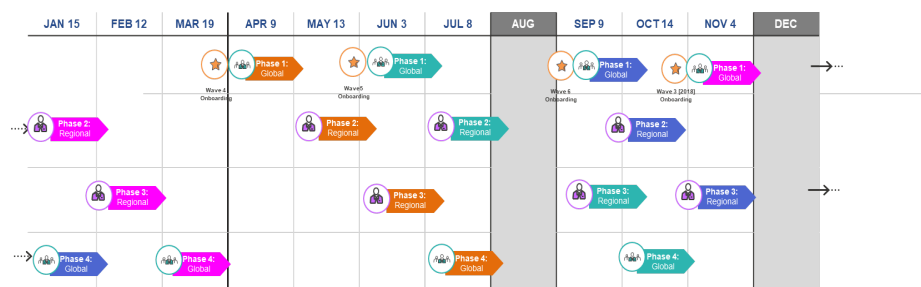


Fig. 3.

Figure 4 shows an example of one week’s worth of content.

I. DEVELOP SELF: DRIVE MERCK STRATEGY				
Module 1: Introduction to Merck Organizational and Talent Strategies				
Merck Source Materials: Merck Strategy doc; UB Leader Discussion Guide; UB Toolkit; UB Companion Guide				
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
<p>Welcome to the Merck Management Foundations Program</p> <p>Read and Download: Program Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants will be introduced to the program in a short activity that highlights what they can expect throughout the experience, how they should navigate the Corp/U platform, and why their participation is necessary in their new role [Program Map] <p>Watch: Sponsor Video</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Sponsor will describe the organization’s talent strategy and the challenges associated with the manager’s role as leader, manager, and coach. <p>Write: Your Profile & Your Role at Merck</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants complete their profile <p>Share: One Vulnerability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants introduce themselves to the cohort, and are asked to identify one vulnerability they feel as they matriculate into the manager role <p>Read: Can You Summarize Merck’s Strategy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants read HBR article that emphasizes how few leaders are able to articulate their organization’s strategy 	<p>Introduction to Merck’s Organizational Strategy</p> <p>Read: Introduction to the Merck Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants read about core components of Merck’s strategy and how they will enable Merck to become the Premier Research-intensive Biopharmaceutical company <p>Watch: Sponsor Video</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Sponsor will describe the strategy and the job of managers in innovating, adapting, and executing in their roles <p>Assess: Your Current Understanding of the Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants are asked to assess their current understanding of the strategy by ranking the extent to which they agree or disagree with 5 statements. <p>Consider & Rank: How empowered are you today to support Merck’s Strategy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants are asked to rank order the five priorities (to include: None and N/A) 	<p>The Impact of Unconscious Bias</p> <p>Watch and Download: What Is Unconscious Bias?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This short video introduces us to Unconscious Bias and how it affects behaviors and decisions [Merck video .mp4 and UB Companion Guide] <p>Read: How Unconscious Bias Harms Talent, Performance and Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This article from UB Leader Guide Module 2) illustrates how Unconscious Bias shows up in varied ways and can undermine sourcing, recruiting, performance reviews, corporate culture, leadership selection, and teamwork. <p>Reflect: Past Decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants will think about their own past decisions or the impact of other’s decisions to identify times when they may have experienced or demonstrated Unconscious Bias. They’ll reflect on factors and conditions that contribute to managers making biased decisions. <p>Watch and Consider: The Impact of Unconscious Bias on Team Assignments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In this short video, a fictitious manager considers how to make an important job assignment. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ2Nl4qst4 	<p>Making Talent Decisions</p> <p>Read: How Does Diversity & Inclusion Build a More Qualified Workforce?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This article offers evidence of how diversity improves innovation; helps organizations adapt to changing customer needs; drives economic growth and attracts the best talent. Attach McKinsey article linked from UB slide <p>Watch: How Diversity Makes Teams More Innovative (TedTalk)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rochi Lorenzo shares research by Boston Consulting Group on the degree to which innovation improves with greater talent diversity. <p>Check: Managers’ Commitment to Diversity at Merck</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A short survey will capture the degree to which Managers accept responsibility to improve diversity. <p>Discuss: Friction Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants are asked to share one friction point they foresee to mitigating unconscious bias while making talent decisions <p>Watch: Why So Few Diversity Hires</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This HBR video describes how managers can improve diversity by attending to the mix of candidates under consideration 	<p>Best Practices and Commitment to Action</p> <p>Review/Plan: Best Practices and My Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants will review a compiled list of best practices to overcome Unconscious Bias in Staffing the Organization, Managing Talent and Managing Teams. They will choose two areas where, by applying best practices, they believe they can make a positive impact. They’ll add to their plan some concrete actions they’ll take to adopt and apply their two best practices. [Need access to underlying documents and/or videos within UB Ed Guide] <p>Share: Post One Commitment to Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants will choose one of the two best practices they plan to adopt and put into action, and share it with the cohort.

Fig. 4.

Shortly after implementation, NPS data captured on the Corp/U platform indicated that participant satisfaction was trending low as the result of content-heavy activities. In effect, managers were struggling with the time required to complete the sprint. Merck and Corp/U quickly pivoted and worked together to reduce the volume of content by eliminating some content, while assigning a portion of content as “optional”. By taking these actions, the Net Promoter Score dramatically improved by 30 points.

With 11,700 managers around the globe and 1,200 new managers hired annually, communication must be clear and consistent. By using Corp/U’s virtual platform Merck established a new standard for communication that builds in accountability and offers ongoing reminders that guide learners toward completion. Further, Merck was able to articulate the purpose of the program, the important role managers play, and why this learning experience mattered. The result has been higher levels of engagement, and the surfacing of actionable insights not otherwise available to the organization, e.g. identified need for clarity in strategic sourcing for diverse talent pools. To date, 1,300 managers have matriculated from the program with clear organizational benefits and high participant satisfaction.

4 Results

For their classroom program, Merck tracked feedback via a survey tool which only provided for a one-way feedback channel. For the virtual program, Merck was able to take advantage of a portfolio of tools offered by Corp/U’s platform to evaluate impact across the organization.

A participant’s first name, last name, and email address initiate a unique user ID which allows the following types of data analysis to be conducted (see Figure 5): quantitative, qualitative, topic modeling, proprietary algorithms, and network analysis.

All metrics are tracked in support of the desired business outcomes.

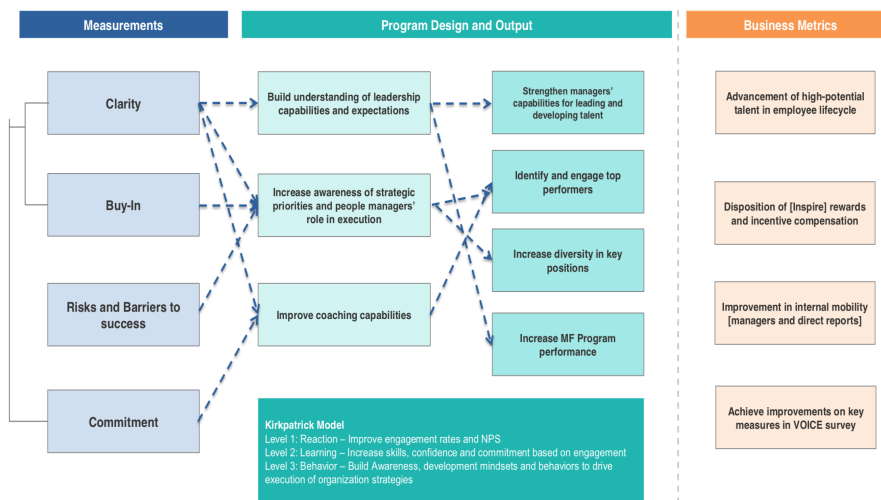


Fig. 5.

Merck has tracked the four business metrics using the following Corp/U data collection tools and has seen a notable change:

1. Advancement of high-potential talent in the employee lifecycle
2. Disposition of rewards and incentive compensation
3. Improvement in internal mobility
4. Achieve improvement on key measure in Merck’s VOICE survey

The program launched on June 1, 2018, and the pilot results were reviewed in November 2018. The program is expected to continue running year-over-year; we’ll be doing a review of cohorts 2 and 3 in late April 2019; however, in advance of this data, Merck has witnessed progress in each of the four areas.

Merck is realizing immense value in the Virtual Management Foundations Program as a method to scale and evolve how they communicate strategy and capabilities to their important manager population. Several divisions and geographies are reviewing the program content and considering how they might tailor the program to their particular audience, enhancing the potential reach of the Virtual Management Foundations Program.

5 Author

Alan Todd is CEO of CorpU. A pioneer in the field of corporate learning, Alan has served as Chairman, CEO and co-founder of KnowledgePlanet, a company that helped launch the online learning revolution. The company grew to serve millions of people in over 150 countries and amassed more than \$150 million in value.

Alan was named Inc. Magazine / Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year for High Technology in the late '90s. More recently, he was appointed by Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett to the Higher Education Commission, charged with improving college access and affordability for commonwealth residents.

Alan is a founding member and trustee of Harrisburg University of Science and Technology, the first private non-profit university in Pennsylvania established in over 100 years. He also serves as a Wharton entrepreneur-in-residence and education entrepreneurship adviser at the Penn Graduate School of Education.

He is a member of the Education Innovation Advisory Board at Arizona State University and a member of the board of advisors of Penn NEST – Networking Education Entrepreneurs for Social Transformation – based at the University of Pennsylvania. He has also been a trustee at Dickinson College, on the Business Advisory Board at Pennsylvania State University and Messiah College, and has acted as an education advisor to the Saudi royal family.

Alan completed his doctoral coursework and holds a master's degree from The University of Pennsylvania.

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